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ABSTRACT

The federally funded Even Start Family Literacy Program supports local family-centered education projects intended to help families with young children break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy. This report documents the efforts of nine Even Start projects that demonstrate promising practices in serving infants and toddlers and their families. The criteria used to select projects included: (1) evidence of practices grounded in developmentally appropriate models for infants and toddlers; (2) project maturity of at least 3 years; (3) annual, per-family operating costs of less than $5,000; (4) evidence of relationships with other organizations or service providers to enhance and sustain services for infants and toddlers and their families; (5) evidence of positive outcomes for families served; and (6) intensity of services provided to infants and toddlers. Chapters are: (1) background for the study; (2) early childhood education for infants and toddlers in the nine projects; (3) the projects' work in parenting education; (4) comprehensive services across the nine projects; (5) contextual factors that shape service delivery in the nine projects; (6) local evaluation and outcomes in the nine projects; and (7) policy recommendations. Appendices present profiles of the nine case study sites and supplemental quality indicators for Even Start family literacy projects serving infants and toddlers. (EV)

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FIRST STEPS TOWARD SCHOOL SUCCESS:

Promising Practices in Even Start Family Literacy Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers and Their Families

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U.S. Department of Education
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1998

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1998

Contents

Page

Executive Summary i

A Study of Promising Practices in Even Start Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers and Their Families 1

- Background for the Study 3
- Early Childhood Education for Infants and Toddlers in the Nine Projects 7
- The Projects' Work in Parenting Education 17
- Comprehensive Services across the Nine Projects 27
- Contextual Factors That Shape Service Delivery in the Nine Projects 31
- Local Evaluation and Outcomes in the Nine Projects 34
- Policy Recommendations 41

References 45

Appendix A: Profiles of the Nine Case Study Sites

- Characteristics of the Nine Even Start Projects in the Study Sample A-1
- Chicago Commons Employment Training Center: Chicago, Illinois A-2
- The Decker Family Development Center: Barberton, Ohio A-5
- Early Education Services: Brattleboro, Vermont A-8
- The Family Service Center: West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana A-11
- Jefferson County Public Schools Even Start Project: Louisville, Kentucky A-14
- Oklahoma City Even Start Project: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma A-17
- Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District Even Start Project: Alamo, Texas . . A-20
- San Jose Mission Family Learning Center: Dover, Florida A-23
- Webster-Groves Even Start Project: St. Louis, Missouri A-26

Appendix B: Supplemental Quality Indicators for Even Start Family Literacy Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers

Executive Summary

New research has turned the nation's attention to the importance of the first few years of life as a crucial period of learning and development. The environments and relationships that shape very young children's experiences have profound effects on their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development—all important factors in future success in school and adulthood. Increasingly, the federal government is supporting programs that improve educational opportunities for low-income families with very young children.

The federally funded Even Start Family Literacy Program (Title I, Part B of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended) supports local family-centered education projects intended to help families with young children—including infants and toddlers—break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy. Even Start programs integrate early childhood education, adult basic and literacy education, and parenting education to involve parents and children, from birth through age seven, in learning. In 1996-97, the federal government provided funding for 637 local Even Start projects. Local projects have considerable flexibility to design services based on family needs. They may provide primarily home-based or center-based services, although some level of home-based services for families is required by law. In recognition of families' multiple and diverse needs and to prevent unnecessary duplication of services, Even Start projects are also required to build on existing services and collaborate with other education programs and service providers.

The Even Start legislation allows local projects to determine the specific age range of children they will serve, so long as they provide services for at least a three-year age range. The U.S. Department of Education encourages serving a wide age span, or the full age span from birth through age seven. According to data from the Even Start Information System (ESIS), most local projects include programming for children from birth to age three. The services that Even Start projects provide to infants and toddlers and their families are of particular importance because of, among other things: (1) the speed and complexity of child development at this age, and (2) the need to capitalize on early learning windows that establish the foundation for future learning.

This study documents the efforts of nine Even Start projects that demonstrate promising practices in serving infants and toddlers and their families. The criteria used to select promising projects included: (1) evidence of practices grounded in developmentally appropriate models for infants and toddlers; (2) project maturity of at least three years; (3) annual, per-family operating costs of less than $5,000; (4) evidence of relationships with other organizations or service providers to

enhance and sustain services for infants and toddlers and their families; (5) evidence of positive outcomes for families served; and (6) intensity of services provided to infants and toddlers.

Each project was visited by a research team whose members conducted interviews with the project staff, the independent evaluator, representatives from collaborating organizations or agencies, and participants. Researchers also observed and documented projects' services to infants and toddlers and their families, and collected and analyzed projects' written materials.

The study looked at the full range of services and issues that the nine case study projects cited as important to service delivery or outcomes for infants and toddlers. Thus, study findings and recommendations encompass some services for the families of infants and toddlers, as well as some contextual factors that shape service delivery in the nine projects.

Early Childhood Education for Infants and Toddlers in the Nine Projects

Within the context of broader family literacy efforts, the nine projects visited in this study work to provide early childhood education services that meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers. Project efforts in this area include attention to: (1) the early childhood environment; (2) curriculum and instruction; (3) assessment; (4) staff training and supervision; and (5) transitions.

Early Childhood Environment

The nine projects visited work to create developmentally appropriate early childhood environments through attention to: (1) providing young children with one-on-one attention and nurturing; (2) providing children with a language-rich environment; and (3) furnishing and arranging infant and toddler classrooms[1] to be appealing and stimulating for very young children. Despite these efforts, some projects faced challenges in securing appropriate facilities for serving infants and toddlers.

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[1] The term "classroom" is used throughout this report when referring to the setting in which infants and toddlers take part in the early childhood education component of the Even Start program. As described later in this report, infant and toddler "classrooms" are designed to meet the needs of very young children and are different from traditional classrooms designed for older children.

Curriculum and Instruction

Most of the nine projects visited draw on a wide array of resources for guidance on curriculum and instruction for infants and toddlers, although a few rely primarily on a specific curriculum model. Infant and toddler staff across the nine projects report that the curricula projects use stress child-directed, active learning, consistent with expert recommendations. Assessing the quality and integrity of the content and implementation of the various curricula used by projects would require extensive observation that was beyond the scope of this study.

Assessment

The projects visited in this study assess infant and toddler development in order to tailor instruction to meet each child's developmental needs and to identify children with developmental delays or other special needs. Recognizing that the accurate assessment of infants and toddlers is a difficult yet important task, the projects use many strategies, including observations of children's development, narrative reports, reviews of children's work, developmental screenings, and conferences with parents. These strategies are consistent with research and expert recommendations, although the resulting data are not easily aggregated.

Staff Training and Supervision

The nine projects face challenges in attracting and retaining qualified early childhood staff to work with infants and toddlers. As a result, many projects rely heavily on paraprofessionals to provide early childhood education services for infants and toddlers. Although the nine projects provide extensive staff training and supervision to address these staffing challenges, a few projects reported difficulty finding training specific to work with infants and toddlers.

Transitions

Most of the nine projects provide services to ease children's transitions between Even Start classrooms and from Even Start into other programs, consistent with expert recommendations. These services include developing individual transition plans for infants and toddlers moving into another classroom or program and accompanying children and parents on visits to these other classrooms or

programs prior to enrollment. In general, efforts to assist children with transitions from Even Start to other programs were more common when the programs were co-located.

The Projects' Work in Parenting Education

Parents of infants and toddlers often enter Even Start projects without a full understanding of their young children's capacity for learning and the importance of their own role in promoting learning through developmentally appropriate stimulation and play. The projects in this study sample use several strategies to enable parents to learn, observe, practice, and build on important lessons in parent-child interaction and infant and toddler development. These strategies include (1) using multiple methods to tailor parenting education to family needs; (2) integrating lessons across project components; (3) designing parent-child activities with attention to parents' personal needs and interests; (4) providing opportunities for parent discussion; and (5) involving fathers and other family members. Although these strategies are good practices for parenting education in general, their use is particularly important for families with infants and toddlers, due to children's rapid development during the first three years of life, the critical learning windows that occur during this period, and children's dependence on their caregivers for the stimulation necessary to take advantage of these early learning windows.

Using Multiple Methods to Tailor Parenting Education to Family Needs

The projects visited in the study provide parenting education for parents of infants and toddlers in multiple formats to accommodate different learning styles, comfort levels, and attitudes. These formats include: (1) parenting education classes; (2) support groups; (3) home visits; (4) parent-child instruction; and (5) one-on-one communication between project staff and parents.

Integrating Lessons across Project Components

The projects visited report that teaching parents about their children's learning and development is more effective when lessons are purposefully integrated across program components and when they involve the children themselves. Many projects' efforts at integration seek to increase parents' understanding of the importance of stimulation and developmentally appropriate play for infants and toddlers. Strategies include inviting early childhood staff to address parenting classes,

encouraging parents to observe in early childhood classrooms, incorporating child development literature in adult literacy classes, and coordinating curriculum planning across components. Several projects also use staffing strategies to strengthen connections between program components such as assigning staff members to provide services in more than one program component (e.g., parenting education and early childhood education) or using formal or informal communication mechanisms among the staff members in charge of different components.

Designing Parent-Child Activities with Attention to Parents' Personal Needs and Interests

Recognizing that parents of infants and toddlers are adults with complex needs, interests, and preferences, projects in the study work to design parent-child activities that are not only developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers, but are also interesting to parents. One strategy that projects use to meet this challenge is to provide parents with activity kits, usually consisting of a book and materials for a related educational activity, for families to use during parent-child interaction sessions, home visits, and on their own. Another strategy used in some projects is to allow parents to preview creative learning activities prior to or outside of parent-child interaction time to prepare them to share these activities with their children during the designated interaction times.

Providing Opportunities for Parent Discussion

The projects visited recognize that in addition to staff-directed instruction, parents of infants and toddlers need time to reflect on and discuss their own personal concerns. Research confirms the importance of such opportunities, suggesting that in addition to building parents' support networks, long-term parent discussion groups can provide opportunities for parents to learn from personal experience and explore new beliefs and behaviors. Some projects attempt to provide opportunities for parent-generated discussion within the context of parenting education classes, while others provide separate support groups designed specifically for this purpose.

Involving Fathers and Other Family Members

The adult participants in the projects visited were almost all female. Recognizing that mothers are not the only significant adults in the lives of the children served, many of the projects visited make special efforts to involve fathers and other family members who are not primary program participants

in parenting education efforts. In several projects these efforts focus on inviting fathers and other family members to attend parenting education sessions and activities. Other projects make a concerted effort to engage fathers in parenting education by varying the content and approach of parenting classes. However, still other projects have struggled with how best to balance the needs of mothers, many of whom are in destructive relationships that may include domestic violence, with the desire to involve fathers and other significant male figures in parenting education efforts.

Comprehensive Services across the Nine Projects

Consistent with Even Start's mandate to serve those most in need of services as indicated by a low level of income, a low level of adult literacy or English language proficiency, or other need-related indicators, families in the nine projects are often highly stressed with few resources or support systems available to them. Project staff emphasize that, in order for Even Start parents and children to engage positively with family literacy education, their basic needs must be met and their support systems fortified.

In the study sample, projects use three main strategies for identifying and addressing the needs of infants and toddlers and their families. These strategies include: (1) conducting sensitive family needs assessments; (2) building strong relationships with other service providers; and (3) conducting family-centered case management. Project staff view these strategies as an integral part of what they do and as essential to the success of Even Start families. However, as projects implement these strategies, they find themselves striving to overcome challenges of collaboration among their own staff and with service providers in the community.

Conducting Sensitive Family Needs Assessments

Consistent with the legislative requirement to screen and prepare participants for services, the projects visited conduct comprehensive needs assessments with incoming Even Start families that include attention to areas of particular importance for families with infants and toddlers, such as access to family support, health, and nutrition services. Although projects use different methods and mechanisms to conduct these needs assessments, a guiding principle of projects' efforts is that any attempt to assess the sources of stress or areas of need in families' lives should occur in the form of respectful, non-threatening conversations. Many projects use home visits as an opportunity to conduct such assessments; many also combine needs assessments with family goal-setting activities.

Building Strong Relationships with Other Service Providers

To ensure that families with infants and toddlers have access to the comprehensive services needed for healthy family functioning and child development, the projects visited work to build strong relationships with other key providers of health and social services. The projects have learned that for many Even Start families, referrals consisting of a name and telephone number only are likely to go unused. Strategies used by the projects to help families connect with needed services include: (1) arranging for needed services to be delivered at the project site on a periodic basis; (2) inviting representatives from key service providers to meet Even Start families at the project site, in the hopes of establishing a connection and basis of trust; and (3) co-locating services with other providers. These strategies require that projects maintain positive, effective relationships with many individuals, agencies, and organizations. Projects in the study sample strive to maintain such relationships but report many challenges and barriers to collaboration. One strategy used by many projects to overcome the challenge of collaboration is to include representatives from relevant agencies and programs on their advisory councils and other decision-making bodies.

Conducting Family-Centered Case Management

Three of the projects in this study are part of large, comprehensive family programs that offer many varied services. In these projects, certain staff members are designated as case managers or outreach workers to provide intensive, individualized services to participating families. These projects cite many benefits to this approach. Free from classroom teaching responsibilities, case managers are available to help families deal with immediate crises that threaten family well-being or may otherwise impede participation in Even Start. Case managers' special knowledge of families' multiple needs also provides a useful perspective for classroom teachers and is particularly valuable in projects that manage Even Start participants' public assistance cases.

Contextual Factors That Shape Service Delivery in the Nine Projects

Local context, including population demographics and current welfare reform efforts, also shapes projects' services for infants and toddlers and their families.

Population Demographics

Consistent with the intent of the Even Start program, a theme common to the nine projects is their effort to tailor services to the special characteristics and needs of the families served. Project efforts in this area include attention to location of services, scheduling of services, and supports necessary to enable full participation. Staffing strategies in the projects also reflect attention to the characteristics of the population served, as projects make efforts to hire staff from the community served and staff that speak the primary language of program participants.

Welfare Reform

Because Even Start projects are required to serve families who are "most in need," as indicated by a low level of income and a low level of adult literacy or English language proficiency, many projects are in contact with states' welfare systems. Projects in this study are considering the implications of welfare reforms on their project design, services, and participants. To accommodate welfare work and/or training requirements, some projects are implementing or considering changes in their adult education components; several are expanding their services for infants and toddlers to accommodate children for longer hours while their parents fulfill their work requirements and are scheduling adult education and parenting classes for these parents in the evenings or on weekends.

Local Evaluation and Outcomes in the Nine Projects

The nine projects' evaluations include very little, if any, information about infants and toddlers, and only slightly more about the effects of parenting education. Although screening and assessment are important parts of the projects' early childhood education programs, infant and toddler assessment results are used primarily to inform individually tailored instruction, special intervention, and communication with parents. Project staff and evaluators cite many reasons for not including data on infants and toddlers in local program evaluation reports, the foremost reason being the time-consuming and resource-intensive nature of aggregating and reporting the results of developmentally appropriate assessments for infants and toddlers. In contrast, most local evaluation efforts are directed toward aggregating and reporting the more easily measured skills and abilities of children age three to five and those of the adults in adult literacy or adult basic education classes.

However, as part of their local evaluation efforts, many projects are beginning to follow the progress of Even Start infants and toddlers through the program and into elementary school. The results from the several projects that reported such tracking efforts in their 1995-96 program evaluations are promising, although the sample sizes are often very small.

Finally, the nine projects visited in the study are also striving to overcome challenges in measuring changes in parenting behaviors and parent-child interactions for program evaluation purposes. The projects have developed several promising approaches in these areas, including developing their own parenting questionnaires and surveys, using observation-based checklists and rating scales to assess changes in parent-child interactions, and using parent portfolios to document growth in parenting skills over time. Results on these measures across the nine projects suggest moderate but inconsistent gains in parenting skills for participating parents.

Policy Recommendations

Our analysis of the study findings identifies major challenges facing the nine projects and suggests several policy recommendations to help strengthen Even Start Family Literacy projects serving infants and toddlers and their families.

Encourage Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Infuse Early Childhood Development Concepts and Strategies into All Aspects of Family Literacy Programming

Projects report that parents of infants and toddlers often participate in Even Start initially to meet their own needs for educational advancement and child care. While these are important objectives, the promising projects reviewed in this study also help parents discover their role as their children's teachers through constant, integrated opportunities to learn, observe, practice, and internalize ways to support infants and toddlers as learners. As research continues to make the case for enriched learning opportunities through parent-child interactions during the first three years of life, projects' work in parenting education takes an even more essential role in breaking cycles of poverty and illiteracy. To maximize the benefit of Even Start services to families with infants and toddlers, the U.S. Department of Education and Even Start State Coordinators should encourage projects serving this age group to infuse early childhood development concepts and strategies into all aspects of family literacy programming, if they are not already doing so. Even Start State Coordinators also may wish to

provide technical assistance on this topic, based on the experiences of the nine projects highlighted in this report.

Encourage Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Form Linkages with Other Providers of Services Needed for Healthy Infant and Toddler Development

The promising Even Start projects in this sample use several strategies to ensure that families with infants and toddlers receive the services needed for healthy family functioning and infant and toddler development, including conducting sensitive needs assessments, forming strong linkages with providers of services needed by infants and toddlers and their families, and conducting family-centered case management. Due to the vulnerability and complex needs of infants and toddlers, the U.S. Department of Education and Even Start State Coordinators should encourage all projects serving this age group to explore such strategies and enter into meaningful collaborative relationships with key local providers on either a formal or informal basis, if they are not already doing so. Even Start State Coordinators also may wish to provide technical assistance to projects on identifying such providers and on developing strong working relationships with them.

Encourage Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Maintain High Staff-to-Child Ratios and Small Group Sizes

Staff at the nine projects stressed the importance of providing infants and toddlers with one-on-one attention and nurturing to enhance emergent literacy and overall development. To this end, projects attempted to provide a large staff-to-child ratio, given fiscal constraints. Among projects with a separate infant classroom (typically for children between six and 18 months), most provided a staff-child ratio of 3:1, consistent with recommendations in the field. Most toddler classrooms and mixed-age classrooms serving both infants and toddlers provided a staff-child ratio of 3:1 or 4:1, also consistent with standards in the field. Research also suggests the importance of small overall group size when providing services to infants and toddlers. As a group, the projects visited were less successful in meeting guidelines for the field in this area. To encourage projects serving infants and toddlers to meet high standards for both staff-to-child ratios and group size, the U.S. Department of Education or Even Start State Coordinators may wish to issue guidance on this topic.

Help Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Access Training Opportunities Specific to Working with This Age Group

Recent ESIS data show that the vast majority of Even Start projects now serve infants and toddlers. However, some of the projects in this sample report difficulties finding affordable and accessible training on approaches for working with this age group. This issue is of utmost importance because the experience of these nine projects suggests that the majority of staff working with infants and toddlers have neither extensive experience nor certification as early childhood teachers. Given their access to state-level resources and ability to convene early childhood staff from multiple projects, Even Start State Coordinators may wish to consider coordinating such infant and toddler training opportunities for Even Start early childhood staff at the state and/or regional levels.

Provide Guidance to Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers on Strategies for Evaluating Project Outcomes for This Age Group

In general the projects in this sample struggled with strategies for evaluating outcomes for infants and toddlers. To help projects with this challenging task, the U.S. Department of Education may wish to consider convening a panel of experts on early childhood assessment issues to develop guidance on this topic. Technical assistance on implementing such guidance could be provided by the Even Start State Coordinators or through the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers.

Help Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Secure Appropriate Facilities for Serving This Age Group

Several projects in the study sample cited problems obtaining adequate space and/or appropriate facilities for serving infants and toddlers. This problem is not unique to Even Start programs. In a recent report on financing child care, Anne Mitchell and colleagues (1997) discuss the challenges of improving or expanding facilities for early care and education. Their report highlights several promising strategies for addressing these challenges at the state and local levels, including the use of tax exempt bonds and state grant and loan programs. Even Start State Coordinators could help Even Start projects serving infants and toddlers to address facility issues by building awareness of such strategies, as well as of any existing state programs that could assist them in their efforts to obtain or improve early childhood facilities.

Help Even Start Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Accommodate the Challenges of Welfare Reform While Maintaining a Focus on Family Literacy

As they respond to the enactment of federal welfare reform in 1996, states are fundamentally altering their welfare systems to eliminate long-term dependency and to move adult recipients into employment. The early experiences of the nine sites visited suggest that Even Start projects serving welfare families will need to be able to make changes in their services—such as incorporating a job-readiness or pre-employment focus into their adult education services or scheduling classes in the evenings or on weekends to accommodate working participants—in order for parents on public assistance to continue in the program. Infants and toddlers whose parents cannot participate in Even Start will miss out on the potentially powerful early learning experiences that projects can offer. Even Start State Coordinators can help projects to address the challenges of welfare reform by providing information on the specific work and/or training requirements for their state's welfare reform initiative, and technical assistance on how projects can modify their programs to help families to continue to pursue their literacy goals while meeting these requirements.

A Study of Promising Practices in Even Start Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers and Their Families

New research has drawn the nation's attention to the importance of the infant and toddler years to future success in school and adulthood. Recent studies consistently demonstrate that children develop skills critical to formal learning long before entering kindergarten, and even before enrolling in traditional preschool programs at ages three or four. New research from the fields of neuroscience, linguistics, and human development points to the critical importance of children's experiences in the first three years of life to later cognitive, emotional, and physical functioning (Begley, 1996; Nash, 1997; Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1994). Further, this evidence suggests that if learning does not occur during critical early "windows" of brain development, some cognitive and sensory deficits may be difficult to overcome.

The significance of the first three years of life as a crucial period of learning and development means that infants and toddlers are extremely vulnerable to the relationships and environments around them. Yet, despite the importance of these early years, studies suggest that many infants and toddlers do not receive the supports needed for healthy development during these formative years. One recent commission found that the challenges facing many infants and toddlers represent a "quiet crisis" (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1994). According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, almost a quarter (24.1 percent) of families with children below age three lived in poverty in 1995 (personal communication with Neil Bennett, National Center for Children in Poverty). Data from the U.S. Census Bureau confirm that children birth to age three represent one of the fastest growing segments among all population groups living in poverty (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). Although poverty does not necessarily translate into developmental problems for children, research shows that it is often an underlying contributor to risk factors such as inadequate prenatal care, exposure to alcohol or drugs, and improper nutrition. In addition, caregivers facing the stresses of economic hardship—as well as other conditions such as social isolation, domestic violence, substance abuse, or illiteracy—may have limited resources to support them in their role as nurturers and teachers of their young children.

In the context of a family literacy program such as Even Start, the language development of infants and toddlers is of special concern. One recent study provides powerful evidence that the amount of language exposure infants or toddlers receive—and consequently the extent of children's vocabulary—is closely tied to the family's socioeconomic status (SES) (Hart & Risley, 1995). In this study, researchers spent two-and-a-half years recording hundreds of hours of interactions among the

parents and infants (beginning at age seven to nine months) of 42 families. When the children were 36 months of age, researchers found that the toddlers in families with the highest SES had a vocabulary of approximately 1,100 words, the middle-lower SES toddlers possessed a vocabulary of about 700 words, and the children of families on welfare had only about 500 words in their vocabulary (Hart & Risley, 1995). They discovered that the infants' language acquisition was directly related to the amount of language exposure they received from primary caregivers. Between the ages of 11 and 18 months, the higher SES children heard an average of 642 words per hour at home, compared with 521 words per hour in blue collar families and only 394 words per hour in the families receiving welfare. These differences are even more alarming when they are extrapolated. By the age of four, children from the high SES families have almost 50 million words addressed to them. For the working-class children, this number is below 30 million, and children in families on welfare hear fewer than 15 million words addressed to them by the age of four (Hart & Risley, 1995). The primary explanation given for these differences is that parents transmit the same experiences to their children that were transmitted to them as children. This intergenerational transmission may be one key to unlocking the problems of illiteracy and undereducation.

These findings make a strong case for the need for high-quality, research-based interventions for poor and developmentally at-risk infants, toddlers, and their families. Increasingly, the federal government has taken a role supporting programs that improve educational opportunities for families with young children. In 1988, Congress created the Even Start Family Literacy Program under Part B of Chapter 1 of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The program has been amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991, the Improving America's School Act of 1994, and the Omnibus Consolidated Rescissions and Appropriations Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-134). According to the 1994 reauthorization (ESEA, Part B, Section 1201), the purpose of the program is to:

> ... help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of the Nation's low-income families by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program...

To fulfill this purpose, Even Start provides grants to local projects to support intensive, family-centered education programs that: (1) involve parents and children in a cooperative effort to help parents become full partners in the education of their children, and (2) assist children in reaching their full potential as learners. Eligible participants in Even Start programs include: (1) parents who are eligible for participation in an adult basic education program under the Adult Education Act, or who are within the state's compulsory school attendance age range (so long as the local educational agency

provides, or ensures the availability of, the basic education component required in the program), and (2) their children who are below the age of eight.

Local projects have considerable flexibility to design services based on family needs. Projects may provide primarily home-based or center-based services, although the provision of some level of home-based, integrated instructional services for parents and children is required by the legislation. Projects can also determine the age range of children they will serve, so long as they provide services for at least a three-year age range. The U.S. Department of Education encourages serving a wide age span, or the full age span from birth through age seven. The authorizing legislation also requires projects to: (1) build on existing community services, including adult education, parenting, and early childhood education programs; (2) arrange for or provide support services to enable participation; (3) coordinate with Title I and other relevant programs; and (4) operate on a year-round basis.

In the 1996-97 program year, the federal government provided funding for 637 local Even Start projects. The services that Even Start projects provide to infants and toddlers and their families are of particular importance because of: (1) the speed and complexity of child development at this age, and (2) the need to capitalize on early learning windows that establish the foundation for future learning.

Background for the Study

As the body of research on infant and toddler development continues to grow, and as the number of at-risk families with young children increases, programs such as Even Start are increasingly becoming a focus of attention for educators and policy makers. This study examines nine Even Start projects that serve infants and toddlers and their families. The findings and recommendations discussed in this report are the product of case studies of these nine Even Start projects. Guiding the study are four major objectives:

(1) To provide an overview of the extent to which Even Start projects provide services for infants and toddlers (from birth to age three);

(2) To provide comprehensive, descriptive information about key features of promising projects' services, design, evaluation approaches, and local context;

(3) To compare and contrast approaches to the delivery of Even Start services to infants and toddlers and their families in promising projects; and

(4) To provide recommendations that can be used to improve projects that serve infants and toddlers.

A fifth objective of this study is to develop quality indicators for use by practitioners in managing and improving Even Start services for infants and toddlers and their families. These quality indicators are included as an appendix to this report.

Overview of the Extent to Which Even Start Projects Serve Infants and Toddlers

According to data from the Even Start Information System (ESIS) for the 1996-97 program year, the vast majority (93 percent) of the 655 Even Start sites[2] across the country serve infants and toddlers. A little more than one-third of these sites (222 sites) report that they specifically target this age group for services. Just under three-quarters of all sites serving infants and toddlers (385 sites) indicate that infant and toddler services would be otherwise unavailable in their community. According to the ESIS data, almost one-third (30 percent) of children participating in the Even Start program nationally are infants and toddlers.

The ESIS also contains information on the families of these infants and toddlers. According to these data, the families of Even Start infants and toddlers reflect a variety of family structures—45 percent include two parents, 35 percent are headed by a single parent, and 19 percent are extended family arrangements. More than half (59 percent) of Even Start families with infants and toddlers have incomes below $9,000 per year, and almost half (46 percent) report that government assistance is the primary source of family income. The majority (64 percent) of participating adults with an infant or toddler enrolled in the program have less than an eleventh-grade education. More than three-quarters (77 percent) are currently unemployed. More than one-third (36 percent) of these adults report that a language other than English is spoken at home.

According to ESIS data, the primary reason for family participation in Even Start among families with infants and toddlers is for the participating parent(s) to obtain a General Educational Development (GED) certificate (47 percent). The second most common reason cited is to learn English (11 percent). Fewer than one-quarter of families report that they enroll in Even Start to become a better parent (9 percent), become a better teacher of their children (6 percent), or improve their children's school success (8 percent).

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[2] Some local projects operate at more than one site with significantly different program designs. In such cases, projects are asked to report ESIS data separately for each site.

The Study Sample

The nine Even Start projects selected for this study are "promising" because they embody key characteristics that research indicates are contributors to strong programs for infants and toddlers. The criteria used to select promising projects include: (1) evidence of practices grounded in developmentally appropriate models for infants and toddlers; (2) project maturity of at least three years; (3) annual, per-family operating costs of less than $5,000; (4) evidence of relationships with other organizations or service providers to enhance and sustain services for infants and toddlers and their families; (5) evidence of positive outcomes for families served; and (6) intensity of services provided to infants and toddlers. Secondary selection criteria favored projects exhibiting characteristics relevant to key policy issues in serving infants and toddlers in family literacy programs, including: service to teenage, limited English proficient, and migrant populations; collaboration with an Early Head Start program; and collaboration with a hospital or health provider. Potential projects were identified through a review of the ESIS database and recommendations of Even Start State Coordinators and ED staff.

Although the nine projects studied are not representative of all Even Start projects—or even all Even Start projects serving infants and toddlers, they do represent an array of settings, project configurations and designs, funding levels, and geographic locations. For some projects included in this study, Even Start is part of a larger organization that coordinates and provides multiple services for many families; for smaller projects, Even Start is often the sole service provided. While most of the projects reviewed in this study offer center-based services at one location, some operate multiple sites, and one is predominantly home-based. The families served by the nine projects reflect the diversity of the Even Start population, varying in family structure, racial and cultural background, risk factors experienced by family members, and other characteristics. The projects in the study sample respond to these diverse conditions in many different ways, but a common theme is that all are striving to overcome the challenges of serving at-risk families with infants and toddlers through innovative, research-based approaches to family literacy.

The projects visited in this study are listed below. A matrix summarizing project characteristics across the nine sites is included on page A-1.

- Chicago Commons Employment Training Center, Chicago, Illinois
- The Decker Family Development Center, Barberton, Ohio
- Early Education Services, Brattleboro, Vermont

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- The Family Service Center, West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana
- Jefferson County Public Schools Even Start, Louisville, Kentucky
- Oklahoma City Even Start, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District Even Start, Alamo, Texas
- San Jose Mission Family Learning Center, Dover, Florida
- Webster-Groves Even Start, St. Louis, Missouri

Each project was visited by a research team whose members conducted interviews with the project director, staff, evaluator, representatives from collaborating organizations or agencies, and participants. Researchers also observed and documented projects' services to infants and toddlers and their families, including early childhood classroom activities, parent-and-child-together sessions, parenting education classes, adult literacy and adult basic education classes, and, at one site, home visits. Projects' written materials, grant proposals, evaluation reports, and other documents were also collected and analyzed for this study.

Outline of This Report

This report is organized into five sections that represent the main areas around which the study findings cluster: early childhood education, parenting education, comprehensive services, contextual factors affecting service delivery, and project evaluation and outcomes. Within each section, we discuss common themes and features among projects visited in the study, challenges faced by projects, and various strategies demonstrated by projects as they strive to meet challenges. The last section of the report presents policy recommendations generated by analysis of study findings. Brief profiles of the nine case study sites are appended to this report.

Because Even Start is an integrated family literacy program, this case study is not limited solely to the services provided directly to infants and toddlers. Rather, it addresses the full range of service delivery dimensions that the nine projects studied cite as important to services or outcomes for infants and toddlers, either directly or indirectly. Thus, some services targeted to the families of infants and toddlers are discussed (e.g., parenting education that helps parents to support their infants' and toddlers' development, comprehensive family services such as health care or mental health care that help to create an improved context for infant and toddler development), as are some contextual factors that affect services to infants and toddlers and their families (e.g., population demographics, the impact

of welfare reform on families with infants and toddlers). Many of these services and issues affect all participating families, not just those with infants and toddlers, but they emerged in the nine projects as particularly important factors shaping service delivery for this age group.

Early Childhood Education for Infants and Toddlers in the Nine Projects

The nine projects visited in this study make efforts to provide early childhood education services that meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers. These services are described below. Extensive guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices with young children have been developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Zero to Three National Center (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Lally et al., 1995). It was not within the scope of this study to assess the extent to which projects met either of these sets of guidelines. Rather, the study documents key features of program services either observed or noted by project staff as being particularly important in serving this age group. These areas include attention to: (1) the early childhood environment; (2) curriculum and instruction; (3) assessment; (4) staff training and supervision; and (5) transitions. Where appropriate, the NAEYC and Zero to Three standards are referenced in describing practices in the nine projects studied.[3] To provide the reader with an example of how infants and toddlers spend their day in an Even Start early childhood classroom, a daily schedule from one of the nine projects is included as Exhibit 1. This schedule provides only a rough guide to children's daily activities; staff at this and other projects stressed the importance of flexibility in order to respond to children's individual needs.

The Nine Projects Work to Create Developmentally Appropriate Early Childhood Environments, But Some Face Challenges in Obtaining Appropriate Furnishings and Facilities

All nine projects work to provide developmentally appropriate early childhood environments for infants and toddlers through attention to: (1) providing young children with one-on-one attention and nurturing; (2) providing children with a language-rich environment; and (3) furnishing and

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[3] According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, developmentally appropriate practice has three dimensions: age appropriateness—what is known about child development and learning at specific ages; individual appropriateness—what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child; and social and cultural appropriateness—what is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Exhibit 1: Infant/Toddler Schedule
Oklahoma City Public Schools Even Start

9:30-10:00	Breakfast with Parents
10:00-10:45	Free Play in Learning Centers
10:45-11:00	Infant Feeding
11:00-11:20	Changing and Toileting
11:20-11:30	Clean Up
11:30-12:00	Lunch
12:00-12:15	Changing and Toileting
12:15-12:45	Playgroup with Parents (Parent-Child Interaction)
12:45-12:50	Clean Up
12:50-1:00	Goodbye Circle with Parents

arranging classrooms to be appealing and stimulating for young children. Despite these efforts, some projects have faced challenges in securing appropriate furnishings and facilities for infants and toddlers.

Staff at all projects stressed the importance of providing infants and toddlers with one-on-one attention and nurturing, a critical feature of quality care noted in research and guidelines for the field (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Lally et al., 1995; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1996). To this end, projects attempted to provide a large staff-to-child ratio, given fiscal constraints. Among projects with a separate infant classroom (typically for children between six and 18 months), most provided a staff-child ratio of 3:1, consistent with expert recommendations (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Lally et al., 1995). Most toddler classrooms and mixed-age classrooms serving both infants and toddlers provided a staff-child ratio of 3:1 or 4:1, also consistent with standards in the field. This adult-to-child ratio increases when parents assist in the early childhood classroom, as they do in some projects. However, research also suggests the importance of a small overall group size when providing services to infants and toddlers (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1996, for example). As a group, the projects visited were less successful in meeting expert recommendations in this area. Zero to Three recommends a group size no larger than six for infants who are not yet mobile, nine for mobile infants (up to 18 months), and 12 for toddlers. Group size in the projects visited ranged from four infants in an infant room, to up to 20 children in a combined infant and toddler classroom. This range seems to be a result of the facilities issues described below.

Projects also work to provide young children with a language-rich environment that enhances later literacy skills. Staff in almost all projects visited cited a focus on early language development through activities such as talking, singing, and reading with individual children. Our brief observations during site visits found teachers interacting verbally with infants and toddlers almost constantly during daily routines (e.g., diapering, feeding) in all projects visited. This practice is consistent with standards in the field and research on language acquisition, which shows that young children whose parents or caregivers talk more frequently to them acquire a larger vocabulary that lasts at least into the preschool years (Begley, 1996). In sites with a large number of Spanish-speaking families, most early childhood staff are bilingual and use a mix of Spanish and English with the children to encourage children both to learn English and retain their native language. Research shows that children as young as two months old can distinguish between the sounds of their native language and other languages not spoken at home (Kuhl et al., 1992). Most projects also use labels throughout the early childhood classroom, including symbols, pictures, and words in English and Spanish, if appropriate. For example, in the Oklahoma City Even Start Project in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, different areas of the classroom and objects within those areas are labeled in Spanish and English, since Spanish is the primary language of about 85 percent of participating families.

The projects in the study sample have also attempted to arrange and furnish their classroom environments to be appealing to young children. The projects decorate their classrooms with children's artwork and pictures, and arrange toys, books, and other learning materials for infants and toddlers at children's eye-level. Many projects also hang stimulating pictures and mobiles from the ceiling, where they are visible to infants and toddlers settling down for, or waking up from, naps. The projects arrange their early childhood classrooms to provide open floor space for mobile infants and distinct learning areas in which toddlers can engage in self-initiated learning and exploration. Common learning areas include manipulatives (to develop fine motor skills through exploration of objects), activity and block areas (to develop large motor and coordination skills), library areas (to enhance language development through one-on-one and small group reading), drama/housekeeping areas (to develop imagination and socio-emotional skills through pretend play), and art areas (to develop aesthetic, creative, and representational skills through exploration of art materials). In projects with only one classroom for children of various ages, a separate area of the room is typically dedicated to the youngest children. For example, the early childhood classroom at the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center in Dover, Florida, has a separate, partitioned area for infants with cribs, developmentally appropriate books and toys, soft foam-like structures for climbing and pulling up, and open floor space for crawling.

Despite efforts to provide developmentally appropriate environments, many projects have struggled with challenges in securing appropriate furnishings and facilities for infants and toddlers. Working with such young children calls for specific furnishings such as cribs, changing tables, and refrigerators for bottles. Facilities requirements include adequate space for active toddlers and conveniently located and appropriate toileting facilities for toddlers and handwashing facilities for staff and children. Although all projects were ultimately able to obtain the furnishings needed to accommodate infants and toddlers, many projects in which the school district is the fiscal agent noted that regardless of cost, getting requisitions approved and processed through a school district bureaucracy is often very time consuming. In the case of facilities, several projects have been unable to obtain ideal facilities for infants and toddlers, either due to inadequate classroom space or lack of appropriate and/or conveniently located toileting or handwashing facilities. Most projects in the study relied on donated facilities. As one project director said, "You take what you can get and work with it."

In a few projects, simply obtaining enough classrooms to accommodate infants and toddlers has been a problem. In the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District Even Start Project in Alamo, Texas, for example, two early childhood classrooms are located in a nearby community center because of a lack of space in district elementary schools. At the Chicago Commons Employment Training Center in Chicago, Illinois, staff assist parents in making arrangements with local child care providers when the capacity of their one infant and toddler room is reached. In a few urban sites, finding safe and appropriate outdoor space for toddlers to play has also been a problem.

Finally, while a few of the early childhood classrooms visited in the study reported that they were licensed by the state, most reported that they were exempt from state licensing requirements because of the limited number of hours they serve children or because parents are present on-site. In general, projects report striving to meet state licensing requirements, regardless of whether they are required to by law. Assessing the degree to which these projects actually met state licensing requirements was beyond the scope of this study. However, it seems that in a few of projects facilities issues may have posed problems if the projects had been subject to these requirements.

Most of the Nine Projects Draw on a Wide Array of Resources for Guidance on Curriculum and Instruction

Research on effective early childhood education programs has shown the importance of developmentally appropriate curricula that engage children as active learners (Gomby et al., 1995).

Although a great deal of teachers' time with infants and toddlers is spent tending to children's physical needs (e.g., diapering, feeding), all projects attempt to nurture children's learning and development by planning educational experiences and interactions that take place at various times throughout the day, after children's immediate physical needs have been met. The nine projects studied tend to draw on a wide array of resources for guidance in planning these activities, although a few base their curriculum primarily on a specific model.

The majority of the nine projects have used an amalgam of resources to develop their early childhood curricula for infants and toddlers. Most report that the reason that they draw on a variety of resources is to tailor learning activities to the special characteristics and needs of the children served. For example, the Oklahoma City project serves a predominantly Spanish-speaking population. As a result, its curriculum stresses emergent literacy in a bilingual setting. The curriculum is based on guidelines drawn from NAEYC, research on bilingual education, early childhood resource materials published by organizations such as the National Education Association and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the work of a university-based collaborator on emergent literacy (this collaborator also serves as the project evaluator). The early childhood curriculum at Chicago Commons is also developed by project staff. This inner-city project serves very poor families with high rates of welfare dependency and domestic violence. Many of the children served have suffered abuse or neglect, and many have language delays. To meet the needs of these children, the project's early childhood specialist draws on various resources to develop a curriculum that challenges these children and meets their physical, social, emotional, and language needs.

In contrast, a few projects draw heavily on a single curriculum model. For example, the Jefferson County project bases its curriculum primarily on the High/Scope curriculum for infants and toddlers, which includes key experiences in the areas of: social relations, sense of self, communication, movement, exploring objects/pre-representation, exploring attributes of objects/classification, comparing and counting, space (e.g., exploring and noticing the relationships of objects to other objects, taking things apart and fitting things together), and time (e.g., anticipating familiar events, noticing the beginnings and endings of time intervals, experiencing fast and slow). Similarly, the Webster-Groves School District Even Start Project in St. Louis, Missouri, draws heavily on Project Construct, a curriculum developed by the state department of education that stresses child-directed, exploratory learning in stimulating environments. This curriculum is focused on promoting development in four primary domains: (1) socio-moral (i.e., building social relationships and fostering curiosity, creativity, confidence, and initiative); (2) cognitive; (3) representational (including language); and (4) physical.

Despite the diversity of specific approaches to curriculum, infant and toddler teachers in all projects report that their curricula stress child-directed, active learning, consistent with recommendations in the field (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Assessing the quality and integrity of the content and implementation of the various curricula used by projects would require extensive observation that was beyond the scope of this study.

The Nine Projects Use a Number of Strategies to Assess the Progress of Infants and Toddlers, Consistent with Recommendations in the Field

Early childhood experts agree that the accurate assessment of infants and toddlers is a difficult, yet important, task. Young children develop rapidly—often in spurts—and their development is "embedded within specific cultural and linguistic contexts" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p.21). However, it is important for early childhood programs to assess children in order to tailor instruction to meet each child's developmental needs and to identify children with developmental delays or other special needs. (A third purpose of assessment—program evaluation—is discussed in a later section of this report.) For young children, NAEYC recommends that assessments occur on an ongoing basis, include input from families, and rely heavily on observations of children's development, descriptive data, collections of children's work, and demonstrated performance during authentic, rather than contrived, activities. The nine projects visited exhibited the full range of these recommended practices.

Consistent with these recommendations, most of the projects studied use observational approaches to assess infants and toddlers. For example, early childhood staff in the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center report that they monitor infants' and toddlers' progress on a daily basis and note significant "graduations" (e.g., from solitary to parallel play) on a bulletin board hanging in the classroom. At Chicago Commons, the early childhood staff has developed an observation checklist that is used throughout the program year to track infants' (0-18 months) and toddlers' (18-36 months) progress in the areas of social-emotional development, physical development, language development, and cognitive development. Several projects, including West Feliciana, Jefferson County, and the Decker Family Development Center in Barberton, Ohio, use daily observation forms to record and share such observations with parents. Other projects report that they conduct observations more informally and communicate significant observations to parents verbally.

In some projects, daily observations are compiled into more long-term reports of children's progress. At the Decker Family Development Center, observations of each child are summarized weekly in individual letters to their parents. At West Feliciana, teachers compile narrative reports

twice a year describing activities that the child enjoys and examples of the child's progress in exploring new surroundings, relating to other children and adults, and showing pleasure in accomplishments.

A number of projects, including Oklahoma City, West Feliciana, and Webster-Groves, also collect portfolios of children's work. Teachers at West Feliciana, for example, are encouraged to collect at least two work samples per month for children's portfolios, and to take photographs of children's activities that do not lend themselves to work samples (e.g., activities with blocks or manipulatives, dramatic play). Teachers are also encouraged to supply anecdotal information relating to the samples or pictures.

Some projects, including Early Education Services in Brattleboro, Vermont, Chicago Commons, Decker, Oklahoma City, and Webster-Groves, also use nationally recognized developmental screening tools such as the Brigance Inventory of Early Development, the Denver Developmental Screening Test, and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to assess infant and toddler development. These tests assess children's developmental progress in areas such as language, fine and gross motor skills, and personal and social skills. Projects report using this information to tailor instruction to children's individual needs and to identify children who may have developmental delays or other special needs for further testing by child development specialists. Indeed, all of the nine projects make efforts to identify children with special needs—either through developmental screening or more informal observations—and to refer them to appropriate services. One project studied—the Decker Family Development Center—provides services for children with special needs on site.

In many of the projects visited, children's progress is assessed in collaboration with parents, also consistent with NAEYC recommendations. For example, at Webster-Groves, early childhood teachers conduct conferences with parents of infants and toddlers at least every three months to update a developmental checklist. At these conferences, parents and teachers discuss children's demonstration of milestones such as tracking objects by sight, crawling, and verbalizing among infants, and using words to express needs, following simple directions, and exercising self-help skills (e.g. using spoon/fork successfully, putting on coat for outdoors) among toddlers. Parents at Webster-Groves also assist staff in completing family history forms, which document each child's health, developmental history, personal characteristics and habits, and feeding, sleeping, and toileting routines. In Oklahoma City, teachers meet with parents twice a year to discuss developmental milestones and expectations and to review portfolios of their children's work. Last year, teachers used short videotapes of children playing in their early childhood classrooms to stimulate a discussion of children's learning and development.

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Implementing assessments in the context of the Even Start program requires particular sensitivity to parents' past experiences in a school environment. Recognizing that most if not all parents have encountered negative feedback from schools, almost all projects emphasized the importance of positive communications with parents regarding assessments. As a child development specialist from the state health department who assesses infants and toddlers with the Denver Developmental Screening Test in the Oklahoma City project noted, "Our parents have received so many negatives about their children, and they need to hear the positives. To have that feedback from a professional is really important." To encourage positive communications with parents, the Decker Family Development Center developed its own reporting form for parents for the Brigance Early Learning Inventory, even though the test has its own scoring sheets. The form developed by the project provides a strengths-based summary of the child's development, including goals and appropriate expectations, and any areas in which extra attention is needed. When they share the form with parents, staff emphasize the variability in rates and patterns of "normal" development for very young children.

The Nine Projects Use Training and Supervision Strategies to Address Staffing Challenges in Early Childhood Education, But Finding Training Specific to Working with Infants and Toddlers Remains a Challenge for Some

All nine projects face challenges in attracting and retaining qualified early childhood education staff to work with infants and toddlers. Most early childhood staff positions are part time with no benefits, and the salary is often low compared to similarly qualified K-12 teachers. As a result, many projects rely heavily on paraprofessionals to provide early childhood education services for infants and toddlers and older children. Project directors report that they look for individuals who are known and respected in the community, have experience working with children, are able to work well with parents and other staff, and are flexible. In some projects, many of these paraprofessionals are former program participants.

The projects visited address these challenges by providing ongoing training and supervision. However, the amount of training that is specific to work with infants and toddlers varies considerably. A few projects reported difficulty finding accessible and affordable training opportunities targeted to work with this particular age group. Projects also support their early childhood staff through supervision strategies. In most of the projects visited, the lines between training and supervision are blurred, as experienced staff members provide guidance, professional development, mentoring, direct supervision, and informal and formal evaluation.

Training. The nine projects provide regular staff training opportunities for early childhood education staff throughout the year. This training includes both training specific to work with young children, and training in the family literacy approach to working with the family as a unit. Most training in the family literacy approach is provided "in-house" by the project director at weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly staff training days. In many projects training specific to work with infants and toddlers is also provided "in-house," most often by an early childhood specialist. This person is generally a certified early childhood education teacher who serves as a mentor and trainer for the rest of the early childhood staff. At the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo project, for example, the early childhood specialist provides training on approaches to working with young children and their families each Friday, and rotates among the early childhood classrooms during the rest of the week to provide additional training and support to the early childhood staff.

Other projects rely more heavily on outside consultants or collaborators for training and support specific to work with very young children. In Oklahoma City, for example, a child development specialist and a language specialist, both from the state department of health, take turns providing weekly one-hour training sessions for early childhood staff members on child development and emergent literacy, respectively. Many projects also report relying on early childhood training provided by the school district and community organizations. In the Jefferson County Even Start Project, for example, staff that work with infants and toddlers participate in district professional development workshops for early childhood teachers, including an annual early childhood summer institute; training sessions at a local Head Start Parent-Child Center; and workshops provided by a local university-based early intervention program. A few projects rely on early childhood training from regional or national organizations, such as the regional educational laboratories or the NAEYC.

The projects visited also encourage staff to pursue external training opportunities on their own. For example, staff at West Feliciana and the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center are encouraged to take courses toward their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential from the local community college. At the Decker Family Development Center, early childhood staff wanting to continue their education and training are offered free tuition at the University of Akron, a collaborating partner with the project.

Finally, although all projects offer extensive training for their early childhood staff, the amount of training that is specific to work with infants and toddlers varies considerably. A few projects reported difficulty finding nearby training opportunities targeted on work with children below age three. At the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center, for example, early childhood teachers receive training on the High/Scope curriculum for preschoolers through the school district, but have been

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unable to find any nearby training opportunities geared specifically to work with infants and toddlers. In general, the costs of attending national training sessions are prohibitive for most projects.

Supervision. In projects employing early childhood specialists, these individuals typically provide direct supervision for the rest of the early childhood staff. In other projects, early childhood staff are supervised directly by the project director. Many projects find value in using supervision as professional development; for example, the director of the Webster-Groves project meets with staff twice a year to discuss their goals, objectives, and teaching performance. At the meetings, the director and staff member come to a consensus based on the director's evaluation of the staff member's performance and the staff member's self-assessment. While most projects report using formal staff evaluation forms and procedures annually or semi-annually, all stressed the greater importance of ongoing observation and feedback. Many cited the usefulness of weekly staff meetings and frequent one-on-one conversations for providing timely feedback and advice.

Finally, although all of the projects visited provide substantial training and supervision for their paraprofessional staff members, some project directors expressed concern about the lack of formal training and experience among these staff members and, in some cases, their limited English proficiency or use of non-standard English.

Several Projects Provide Services to Ease Children's Transitions Between Classrooms or Programs

Transitions between programs or classrooms within programs can create a lack of continuity and stress for children. To ease this stress, early childhood experts recommend providing transition services for children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Several of the Even Start projects visited had specific strategies for easing children's transitions among Even Start early childhood classrooms and, ultimately, into elementary school.[4] For example, at West Feliciana as toddlers approach age three, they move into a co-located Head Start program. Staff assist with this transition by developing an individual transition plan for each child and arranging for a series of visits and short stays in the Head

[4] Transitions between classrooms or programs do not necessarily mean that children do not continue to receive Even Start services. Even Start projects may serve children until they reach age eight. If a parent has not completed his or her educational program, projects may continue to serve children until age ten. Six of the projects visited served school-aged children by supplementing elementary school services. The remaining three served both infants and toddlers and older preschool-aged children.

Start classroom that the child will eventually join. The Head Start teachers say that the children who transition into their rooms from Even Start infant and toddler classrooms demonstrate better social skills and are more comfortable separating from their parents, compared to children who did not participate in Even Start services. According to one Head Start staff member, "[Children who received Even Start infant and toddler services] are better at following directions, they are used to the environment, and their parents are more comfortable coming to [the teachers] with concerns." Similarly, at Webster-Groves staff work with families to transition children among its three early childhood classrooms (serving children from birth to 18 months, 18 months to three years, and three years to five years), introducing them gradually, at a pace that is comfortable for each individual child. Staff at Webster-Groves also assist in the transition to elementary school, including accompanying parents to conferences with kindergarten teachers. In general, efforts to assist children with transitions from Even Start to other programs or into elementary school were more common when the programs were co-located.

The Projects' Work in Parenting Education

According to staff of the nine projects, many parents[5] of infants and toddlers enter Even Start programs with limited awareness of their child's capacity for learning and the importance of their own role in promoting learning through stimulation and play. This perception is reflected in the results of a 1997 national survey of parents of birth to three-year-olds indicating that parents do not fully understand the connection between their own parenting practices and the social, emotional, and intellectual aspects of child development (Zero To Three, 1997). However, mounting research evidence confirms that parent-child interactions have powerful learning effects for infants and toddlers. From simple physical stimulation with the youngest infants (Gewirtz & Pelaez-Nogueras, 1992), to repetition and routine (Nelson & Collines, 1991) and frequent, appropriate talking to infants and toddlers (Begley, 1996), caregivers' practices have a significant effect on children's cognitive, social, and emotional functioning.

Even Start staff interviewed for this study report that parents often initially view the early childhood staff as babysitters responsible only for tending to the physical needs of their children while parents attend classes. Indeed, parents may perceive their own role as limited to that of physical

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[5] "Parents" refers to the primary caregivers of the children participating in Even Start. In most cases, "parents" are the mothers (and much less frequently, fathers) of Even Start children; primary caregivers also include grandparents and other relatives or legal guardians.

provider—but not teacher—for their very young children. Staff noted that these perceptions make parenting education especially important for effecting outcomes for infants and toddlers. They point out that parenting education, though challenging, can be particularly effective with first-time parents of infants and toddlers because their parenting behaviors and patterns may not be as established as those in parents of older children.

The nine Even Start projects in this sample are responding to the special needs and opportunities for effecting infant and toddler outcomes through parenting education in ways that reflect both the premises of Even Start and current research in family development. Recognizing that high-quality child care alone does not translate into healthy development, school readiness, and literacy, one of the goals of Even Start is to teach and empower parents to promote their children's educational growth through parent-child interactions and the home environment. The projects in this sample see one of their primary goals as helping parents develop behaviors and beliefs that support their young children as learners. To this end, projects use a number of strategies to enable parents to learn, observe, practice, and build on important lessons in parent-child interaction and child development.

The parenting education strategies practiced by the Even Start projects in this study also reflect findings in current research about teaching parenting beliefs and behaviors. In Powell's (1995) summary of this research, he identifies important elements of effective parenting education programs, including:

- ***Beginning where parents are.*** Effective programs probe parents' views of their needs, focus on parents' interests and concerns, and present new information with sensitivity to parents' existing beliefs and practices. The Even Start projects reviewed in this study respond to parents' individual needs and expectations and design parenting education to meet parents' diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

- ***Encouraging discussion.*** Discussion helps parents to process new ideas, compare different approaches to parenting, reflect on their own beliefs and practices, and solve problems. Discussion may also increase parents' perceived social support. The nine Even Start projects provide opportunities for discussion in parenting classes, support groups, and home visits, balancing presentations with opportunities to reflect, practice, and talk about new approaches.

- ***Using multiple methods.*** Effective programs are flexible and use multiple methods of service delivery to meet the varied parental needs. For example, they offer both home visiting and group-based services and provide services at varied locations and times. The Even Start projects in this study infuse parenting education throughout the project and employ varied approaches including role playing, activities, discussions, visual displays, and presentations.

- ***Maintaining a balanced focus.*** Parenting education programs should maintain a focus on parenting, while at the same time acknowledging other pressing family issues and circumstances. The nine Even Start projects emphasize the importance of this balance, and make an effort to listen to parents' concerns and link them with appropriate services.[6]

The following discussion presents strategies the projects use to make parenting education efforts relevant and effective for the families served. These strategies include: (1) using multiple methods to tailor parenting education to family needs; (2) integrating lessons across project components; (3) designing parent-child activities with attention to parents' personal needs and interests; (4) providing opportunities for parent discussion; and (5) involving fathers and other family members. Although these strategies are good practices for parenting education in general, their use is particularly important for families with infants and toddlers, due to children's rapid development during the first three years of life, the critical learning windows that occur during this period, and children's total dependence on their caregivers for the stimulation necessary to take advantage of these early learning windows. The examples and brief vignettes presented in this section illustrate the changes that parents of infants and toddlers undergo as they experience the multiple facets of parenting education in promising projects.

The Projects Use Multiple Methods to Tailor Parenting Education to Family Needs

The projects in this study recognize that parents' strengths and needs are highly individualized. As noted in Powell (1995), effective parenting education "begins where parents are" and builds on their existing knowledge and beliefs. Projects use a number of strategies to meet these objectives. By using multiple methods to reach parents, projects accommodate different learning styles, comfort levels, and attitudes. In these projects, parenting education for parents of infants and toddlers takes multiple forms:

- ***Parenting education classes*** typically use group and individual activities, reading materials, and discussion to teach concepts in child development and parenting. Several projects follow a structured curriculum, such as The Nurturing Program or the Bowdoin Method, which teach child development concepts and parent-child communication and discipline techniques, and encourage parents to explore their own beliefs about parenting.

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[6] This element is addressed in more detail in the Comprehensive Services section of the report.

- ***Support groups*** are offered separately or as a part of parenting classes. Rather than follow a curriculum, parents usually generate their own topics of discussion and share their experiences as parents.

- ***Home visits***[7] focus on a parent-child activity, lessons in parenting education or child development, or meeting the families' pressing needs. Although the focus of home visits varies across projects according to project design and participant needs, all home visits provide an opportunity for private staff-family interaction in a family-friendly setting.

- ***Parent-child instruction***[8] also varies across projects, but most often occurs when parents enter early childhood classroom(s) as a group to read, play, or engage in structured activities with their children.

- ***One-on-one communication*** between project staff and parents reinforces parenting concepts covered in classes and support groups, and personalizes information for individual infants, toddlers, and parents. Communication may be both informal (e.g., when a parent visits in the early childhood classroom) and formal (e.g., at a scheduled parent-teacher conference).

> Elise is a nineteen-year-old mother of a five-month-old girl. Through her participation in Even Start she has learned much about her daughter's capacity for learning. She says that before working with the Even Start home visitor, she did not understand that infants as young as her daughter were capable of playing games and interacting with adults. When her home visitor first introduced her to the idea of playing "peek-a-boo" with a tiny baby, Elise "thought she was crazy." However, Elise has found that she enjoys stimulating her daughter and loves to play these games.

The Projects Integrate Lessons across Project Components to Enhance Parenting Education

All nine projects teach parents of infants and toddlers about early child development and the importance of providing stimulating, appropriate learning opportunities for young children. Some projects provide parents with materials from their early childhood curriculum, or invite child development experts to speak about development with parenting education classes. While these

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[7] Home-based instructional services are a required component of Even Start programs.

[8] Joint parent-child instruction is also a required Even Start component. In many projects, including all projects in this study sample, this instruction takes the form of parent-child interaction time, commonly referred to as Parent and Child Together time or PACT time.

practices can be effective, many projects have found that teaching parents about their children's learning and development is more effective when lessons are purposefully integrated across program components and when they involve the children themselves.

Many projects' efforts at integration seek to increase parents' understanding of the importance of stimulation and developmentally appropriate play for infants and toddlers. These efforts reflect the work of nationally recognized early childhood experts, who have identified core parent-child interactions that promote learning for infants and toddlers. For parents of infants, this list includes regular touching, holding, and soothing of a baby; talking to a baby with simple words and phrases; and playing simple games such as peek-a-boo (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995). Activities for toddlers should promote children's self-control, sharing and negotiation skills, and emotional development (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1994).

According to staff at the nine projects, these parenting practices are not always valued by parents entering Even Start projects. Staff indicate that one of the major barriers to parents' involvement in their children's play in parent-child activities or at home is that they do not see a reason for it. At the Decker Family Development Center, early childhood staff that work with infants and toddlers visit the parenting class that immediately precedes PACT time to explain the upcoming PACT activity with parents and to tie it to child development concepts. In this way, parents realize than an activity that may initially seem silly—such as playing with Jello—is a rational, important exercise in infant sensory stimulation. After PACT time, parents review their experience and discuss their observations with the early childhood staff.

Project staff have also discovered that they can reinforce lessons in parenting by encouraging parents to observe infants and toddlers in early childhood classrooms. Many projects decorate their early childhood classrooms with parents in mind, posting schedules, developmental charts, learning objectives, and samples of children's work on the walls and doors. Parenting instructors at several sites gave examples of parents who, after observing other children in their infant's or toddler's classroom, deepened their understanding of developmental stages and common behaviors. Some projects intentionally tie parenting lessons to observations in early childhood classrooms. At the Jefferson County project, parents first read magazine articles about early brain development in adult literacy classes, and then observe their children's behavior and interactions during PACT time. In the subsequent parenting class, they discuss the connections between the information in the reading and their observations of their own children.

Coordination across components may also be more formalized and include staff from all program components. One example is at the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center, where project staff use monthly Family Literacy Review meetings to refocus and coordinate their efforts toward the project's cross-cutting goals for families. Similarly, staff at the West Feliciana project hold monthly Action Meetings to coordinate their teaching efforts across the early childhood, adult literacy, and parenting education components. They create a Curriculum Action Plan to ensure that, for example, the issues that parents discuss in parenting class link to their social studies reading in adult literacy, the books they read with their children during PACT time, and the activities their children carry out in class. Similarly, staff make sure that guest speakers, presenters, field trips, and other events all tie in to the different program components. The director explains that this integrated approach helps reinforce "the big picture" with both staff and parents: that whole families are engaged in learning together in the program.

Several projects in the study sample also use staffing strategies to strengthen connections between program components. One strategy projects use is to assign staff members duties that cut across program components. For example, a single staff member may hold classroom teaching duties as well as home visiting responsibilities. At the Jefferson County project, for example, the infant and toddler teachers also conduct home visits. This way, the home visitor can capitalize on her personal knowledge of the child's behaviors and interactions from the classroom to tailor home visiting activities and lessons accordingly. Also, explained one staff member, "The child needs to see you someplace other than school, to build that connection." In some sites, home visits are conducted by staff who also lead parent support groups and classes. This arrangement allows staff to follow up on class discussions during private conversations with families on home visits.

Other projects promote open communication among the staff members in charge of different components to ensure that information about parenting issues is addressed consistently by staff throughout the project. For instance, a home visitor in the Oklahoma City project knew from staff meetings and informal conversations with an infant/toddler teacher that a child was exhibiting aggressive, violent behavior in class. The home visitor planned her next visit with this knowledge in mind, and was able to work with the parent on strategies for coping with the child's aggressive behaviors. At Early Education Services in Vermont, home visitors who are responsible for parenting education for parents of infants and toddlers share relevant written materials about child development with the literacy tutor, who uses them in activities to reinforce concepts in parenting as well as reading comprehension.

More formalized communication mechanisms may be necessary to ensure coordination in projects that collaborate with other organizations to provide parenting services. At the Oklahoma City

project, for example, Even Start home visitors meet regularly with the home visitors from the local Parents as Teachers (PAT) program who visit many of the same families. At the meetings, home visitors make sure that they are not duplicating services and that their services for families are consistent and meet families' needs. The San Jose Mission Family Learning Center, which collaborates with the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program to conduct home visits, also relies on regular communication between home visitors. Staff at both of these Even Start projects have found that, although their approach to home visiting may differ from that of their collaborative partners (e.g., PAT and HIPPY use structured curricula, while many Even Start home visitors pick and choose activities from a variety of sources), regular meetings promote mutual understanding and cooperation.

A common theme raised by staff in the projects visited in this study is the importance of communication between home visiting and classroom staff. Teachers who benefit from information about families from home visitors can make their classes more relevant to families' lives, without personally confronting parents about sensitive issues. Often these issues are closely connected to parenting, but relate more to general family functioning. In this way, parenting classes and support groups can more effectively cover such issues as home environment, establishing routines (particularly for bedtimes), nutrition, hygiene, family budgeting, and general life skills. Many Even Start participants across the projects described changes in home environment and nutrition habits that they had implemented as a result of parenting and life skills classes. These practices demonstrated by the nine projects also mirror research findings that parenting skills should be taught in the context of other adult roles and skills, rather than as an isolated set of skills (Powell, 1996).

Susan is an early childhood assistant in one of the projects and a former Even Start parent. Both of her children started Even Start in the infant/toddler room and stayed in the program until kindergarten. Susan reports that her parenting education classes while she was in Even Start caused her to change her parenting behaviors drastically—she started talking with her children more, setting firm limits, and giving them choices. She says that changing her ways was difficult, and that she resisted at first. According to Susan, "I used to try those new techniques just to prove them wrong, but they worked with my kids!" Now, Susan proudly reports that both of her children are on the honor roll in elementary school.

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The Projects Design Parent-Child Activities With Attention To Parents' Personal Needs and Interests

Parents of infants and toddlers are adults with complex needs, interests, and preferences that extend beyond, but exert strong effects on their role as parents. In their parenting education efforts, the nine projects have developed innovative ways to meet the challenges specific to educating and empowering the parents of infants and toddlers in the context of parent-child instruction.

One challenge is that parent-child activities—whether for classrooms or home visits—must not only be developmentally appropriate for children under three, but also engaging and enjoyable for parents. According to staff at several projects, many parents may initially resist parent-child activities because they have been enjoying the company of other adults (a break from being a parent) and/or they do not see the value or joy in playing with their very young children. One former Even Start parent at the Oklahoma City project explained, "At first, home visits were a chore...But I finally learned how to play!" Additionally, many parents, particularly teenagers, may want to dominate activities that are intended to be shared with children because, as one staff member explained, "They never got to do these kinds of activities when they were children, so they feel they missed out."

One strategy that projects use to meet the challenge of parent-child instruction is to provide activity kits, usually consisting of a book and materials for a related educational activity, for families to use during PACT time sessions, home visits, and on their own. The kits are developmentally appropriate for different ages (e.g., they accommodate children's varied comprehension levels, dexterity, and attention spans), emphasize literacy, and give parents some guidance for structuring their interactions with their children. Another strategy used by the staff at the Webster-Groves project is to make sure that parents have their own creative learning activity to work on outside of PACT time, so they are prepared to share with their children during PACT time. Similarly, parents at the Jefferson County project ease into PACT time by beginning an activity in their own classroom and taking it with them to share with children in the early childhood classroom.

Eva, the young mother of a hyperactive three-year-old boy, lost her temper easily and became frustrated with her son's frequent outbursts. However, as she began spending time with her son and a trained instructor in the Even Start parent-child learning center, she learned more about his behavior and how to cope with it. Eva also noticed that her son seemed calmer and more focused while playing in the center, and now he speaks more often and bonds with other adults. Eva describes with pride her new sense of self-confidence as a mother and the reduction of stress in her life.

The Projects Provide Opportunities for Discussion to Encourage Reflection on Parenting Behaviors and Build Parents' Support Networks

All parents need time to reflect on and discuss their own personal concerns as well as the parenting concepts and issues determined by the staff to be important. This need is particularly important for parents of infants and toddlers who must cope with the demands and stresses of caring for such young children, and who may also be first-time parents. Current parenting research (see Powell, 1996) finds that in addition to building parents' support networks, long-term parent discussion groups can provide important opportunities for parents to learn from personal experience and explore new beliefs and behaviors. However, parents' core beliefs about parenting may reflect deeply held and culturally bound values that must be approached with care and respect (Powell, 1996). At one of the nine projects, a staff member explained that parenting education "must be a dance between curriculum and process," meaning that a rigid, inflexible curriculum will stifle valuable personal discussions, but a free-wheeling support group may miss crucial issues that parents do not bring up on their own. To address this, some projects purposefully distinguish parenting classes from support groups. At Chicago Commons, parents in support groups generate their own topics, as long as they reach consensus about what to discuss; a set parenting curriculum is taught separately. In the West Feliciana project, parenting staff have found that some structured activities, such as watching a video and then engaging in role playing exercises, help parents feel more comfortable. The project also runs two parenting groups, one for older parents and another for younger and teenage parents.

> Donna is a seventeen-year-old mother of a two-year-old boy. Through her participation in Even Start, she has learned about her son's stages of development and what kinds of behaviors she should expect. She says she enjoys reading the child development materials she receives from her parent educator, who selects the materials in consultation with the Even Start program's early childhood specialist. According to Donna, "You read about [a type of] behavior, and then the next day he [my son] is doing it!"

Several Projects Make Efforts to Involve Fathers and Other Family Members

Adult participants in the nine Even Start projects are almost all female[9], and although not all of them live at home with a husband, many have a male figure or other family members involved in their

[9] Among the eight projects with data available, in the 1996-97 program year females comprised 96 percent of enrolled adults. Two projects had no males enrolled during this year.

own and their children's lives. Staff of the projects visited in the study report that many mothers are not supported in their efforts to implement new parenting skills and knowledge learned in the program by their male counterparts or other family members who have not participated in Even Start. Recognizing that mothers are not the only significant adults in the lives of the children served, several of the projects make special efforts to involve fathers and other family members who are not primary program participants in parenting education efforts. Other projects have encountered special challenges and concerns in involving significant male figures, including issues of domestic violence.

In an effort to involve all significant adults in young children's lives, the Even Start project at Chicago Commons, for example, collaborates with Lekotek—a national parent-child interaction program based in Illinois—to offer private parent-child play sessions to all Even Start families. Parents are encouraged to bring fathers, siblings, grandparents, and other family members to these sessions to promote maximum carryover between the play sessions and the child's home and community environment. Each session includes time for family members to ask questions and raise concerns, and at the end of each session, families may borrow developmentally appropriate toys or books from the lending library.

Other projects make a concerted effort to engage fathers in parenting education by varying the content and approach of parenting classes. To this end, the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo project offers Padres Con Poder, a parent empowerment program geared toward fathers that uses audio-visual programming and group discussions to teach skills in goal-setting, supporting children's educational achievement, preventing violence, and promoting healthy family interactions. The program, developed by a Hispanic man originally from the Rio Grande Valley, is offered for all Even Start families in the summer, when men's work schedules are more flexible. Another notable effort towards male involvement is at Brattleboro's Early Education Services, where a men's program specialist funded through a collaborating agency runs all-male support groups that give fathers an opportunity to discuss parenting and relationship issues, among other topics. The specialist also organizes men's recreational and community service activities, conducts home visits with a small number of fathers, and functions as an advocate for male involvement in the program as a whole.

Other projects have struggled with how best to balance the support needs of mothers, many of whom are in destructive relationships that may include domestic violence, with the desire to involve fathers and other significant male figures in parenting education efforts. Staff and participants at these projects say that parenting programs, particularly support groups involving the discussion of personal or sensitive topics, are much more effective when they exclude men. In a related concern, many staff across projects said that male jealousy and anger are common when women exhibit empowerment or

other new behaviors developed through the Even Start experience. As one case manager noted, "I have one husband who said he would blow up this building because his wife changed so much [as a result of the program]." The projects have not generally found clear solutions to this problem. This particular case manager says that she attempts to work with all family members during home visits to encourage them to recognize that the mother's efforts to get a better education are good for the whole family. Another project incorporates communication skills and strategies into its parenting education classes to provide women with the tools to better communicate with their spouses and boyfriends.

Comprehensive Services across the Nine Projects

Federal legislation calls on Even Start projects to serve families that are most in need of Even Start services, as indicated by a low level of income, a low level of adult literacy or English language proficiency, and "other need-related indicators". Consistent with this requirement, participants in the projects visited in this study exhibit characteristics of highly stressed populations with few resources available to them. Homelessness, neglect, incest, substance abuse, mental illness, and destructive relationships affect the families of many of the Even Start participants with children under three years of age. At Chicago Commons, over 80 percent of participants are current or former victims of domestic abuse. Teenage parents, many of whom still live at home, often face other difficulties, including poor relationships with their own parents. In addition, many infants and toddlers enter Even Start with developmental or language delays, poor health, behavioral disorders, evidence of abuse, or other problems. Regardless of participants' specific difficulties, project staff report that most Even Start families lack strong support systems, such as extended family or reliable friends and neighbors, and the means to secure other sources of support. Such support systems are particularly important for families with infants and toddlers who must cope with their children's rapid development and demanding physical and emotional needs, and who may also be first-time parents. Because of the unique vulnerability of infants and toddlers, their well-being and ability to thrive depend significantly on family health and functioning.

The nine projects use three key strategies for identifying and addressing the needs of infants and toddlers and their families. These strategies include: (1) conducting sensitive family needs assessments; (2) building strong relationships with other service providers; and (3) conducting family-centered case management. Project staff view these strategies as an integral part of what they do and as essential to the success of Even Start families.

The Projects Use Sensitive Needs Assessment Systems to Identify Family Needs and Help Families Overcome Barriers and Achieve Goals

Consistent with the legislative requirement to screen and prepare participants for services, the projects visited conduct comprehensive needs assessments with incoming Even Start families that include attention to areas of particular importance for families with infants and toddlers, such as access to family support, health, or nutrition services. Many of the projects update these assessments on a regular basis to ensure that families' changing needs are addressed in a timely way. Although projects use different methods and mechanisms to conduct needs assessments with Even Start participants, a guiding principle of projects' needs assessment systems is that any attempt to assess the sources of stress or areas of need in families' lives should occur in the form of respectful, non-threatening conversations. This is particularly important, according to project staff, because most Even Start families use multiple public services that require them to divulge personal information to strangers. Several projects reported that approaching needs assessments in a "soft," respectful way also yields another benefit: the process itself becomes an intervention, by sparking discussion about what it means to be a healthy family. Staff at the Webster-Groves project approach the intake process as they would a counseling session, emphasizing the building of trust and rapport with family members. Many projects use home visits as a safe setting for conducting needs assessment, which may take place over the course of several sessions or even after a family has been enrolled in the program for a while. In many of the projects, needs assessments are combined with ongoing family goal-setting activities. For example, at the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center families assess their challenges, needs, goals, and accomplishments monthly as part of their work on family portfolios.

Project Staff Strive to Build Strong Relationships with Other Service Providers to Ensure That the Needs of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families Are Met

To ensure that families with infants and toddlers have access to the comprehensive services needed for healthy family functioning and infant/toddler development, the nine projects work to build strong relationships with other key providers of health and social services. However, Even Start projects have learned that regardless of the size of their collaborative service networks, referrals are meaningless if families do not connect with and benefit from the appropriate provider(s). The projects know that for families who have been socially isolated, are under stress or in crisis, or have had negative experiences with service providers, referrals consisting of a name and telephone number only are likely to go unused. Project staff know that they must make sure that, as one staff member said, "the connection goes through."

One strategy used by projects to make sure that infants and toddlers and their families receive needed services is to negotiate collaborative arrangements whereby such providers agree to periodically provide services at the project site. At the Oklahoma City project, for example, staff from the state health department visit the project several times a year to screen children for developmental delays and hearing and speech problems. Similarly, at the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center, a local doctor in private practice comes to the center several times a year to provide health checks and other services, such as immunizations.

A similar strategy used by projects is to invite representatives from key service providers to meet with Even Start families at the project site, in the hopes of establishing a basis of trust so that families will feel more comfortable accessing their services. To this end, several projects invite representatives from local agencies to address parenting classes or support groups. In some cases, this representative may be part of the Even Start project itself. For example, a counselor with the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center conducts parenting support groups to build a foundation of trust with parents, most of whom for cultural reasons are initially reluctant to seek private counseling. She says that once parents feel comfortable with her in class, they schedule private sessions with her. In a similar example, the provider of Lekotek parent-and-child programming at Chicago Commons makes presentations in adult classes and uses an "open door" policy to encourage parents to seek out her services when they are ready.

Finally, several projects are co-located with other key providers of services to families with infants and toddlers. The West Feliciana project, for example, is located in a family service center that also houses a weekly pediatric clinic staffed by a physician, two full-time nurses that provide health screenings and immunizations, and two part-time social workers. This co-location offers a crucial convenience in a rural setting where services are otherwise scarce and scattered.

These strategies for linking families of infants and toddlers with needed services require that the projects maintain positive, effective relationships with many individuals, agencies, and organizations. Project staff emphasize that doing so often poses a major challenge, especially when prospective collaborators face factors such as: conflicting rules and regulations, different service styles or philosophies, personality conflicts, or political circumstances unfavorable to cooperation. The projects, in their efforts to forge collaborative agreements with many service providers, encounter numerous challenges and barriers to collaboration. Many project directors report resistance or actual refusal to enter into collaborative relationships by some local agencies and programs. Some projects indicate that other local providers of early childhood services (e.g., Head Start, Parents as Teachers, or other

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preschool programs) often view Even Start projects as competitors for students. Other projects have experienced tension with collaborators over different approaches to serving families at risk or in crisis.

However, the nine projects have implemented many strategies for overcoming the challenges of collaboration. Several projects include representatives from relevant agencies and programs on their advisory councils and other decision-making bodies. Their presence, as well as that of respected or powerful community members, can facilitate a cooperative spirit among players. For example, at the Webster-Groves project, the mayor and several members of the local school board serve on the Even Start advisory committee; their presence encourages other local service providers to more readily work with and accommodate Even Start families. Another project, the Decker Center, demonstrates an unusual and extremely successful model of collaboration. Decker is the product of a collaboration between three primary agencies—and numerous other collaborators—that have seamlessly integrated their efforts into a new identity, known as "Decker programming." Staff at Decker refer to their success as "co-construction," a term describing "a blurring of program distinctions and ambiguity on the part of clients and many staff concerning what agency is offering what service." Co-construction has enabled the staff at Decker to overcome turf problems and to make their first priority meeting the multiple and complex needs of families. Services available at Decker include health and mental health care services for both adults and children and speech and language screening and therapy.

A promising new collaborative relationship engaged in by one of the projects involves an early Head Start program funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Early Head Start programs serve children pre-birth to age three and their families, and are based on the four cornerstones of family development, child development, community development, and staff development. Early Education Services operates its Even Start program in conjunction with an Early Head Start program. For the most part, staff at Early Education Services report that Even Start and Early Head Start are natural partners, sharing common goals and approaches to serving families. However, project staff indicate that the discrepancy in age-focus between the two programs (Even Start serves children birth to age eight, while Early Head Start stops at age three) can mean that the program has difficulties meeting the need for serving children age three to eight.

Several Projects Use a Family-Centered Case Management Approach to Ensure that Families Receive Needed Services

Three of the Even Start projects in this study are part of large, comprehensive family programs that offer many varied services. An approach that characterizes these three projects is that they

designate staff as case managers or outreach workers to provide intensive, individualized services to participating families.[10] These staff members do not have classroom teaching responsibilities, but they are deeply involved in every aspect of projects' services.

Although case managers' central role—to ensure that families' needs are met comprehensively—does not vary, their specific job descriptions differ across projects. Some case managers conduct frequent home visits; others are available most of the day at the project site. Some case managers also function as public assistance case workers for Even Start participants. When necessary, case managers also may play an advocacy role for families during appointments with service providers in the community. One project describes case managers as "the bridge between families and the program," because they help families find and use needed services, both within the project and in the greater community.

Projects that use the case management model cite many benefits as a result of assigning a family to one staff member. Free from classroom teaching responsibilities, case managers are available to help families deal with immediate crises that threaten family well-being or may otherwise impede family participation in Even Start. Case managers' special knowledge of families' multiple needs and goals also provides a useful perspective for Even Start classroom teachers and is particularly valuable in projects that manage Even Start participants' public assistance cases. In such projects, regular contact with families, their Even Start teachers, and other service providers gives case managers a holistic understanding of families' situations, which they use to make informed decisions about the families' public assistance cases. For families on welfare with infants and toddlers, case managers can use their legal authorization to help find and maintain appropriate health and child care arrangements.

Contextual Factors That Shape Service Delivery in the Nine Projects

The previous sections have discussed how projects respond to and structure their services around developmentally appropriate practices for infants and toddlers and meeting other special needs of families with very young children. But these are not the only forces at work on the design and delivery of good projects. Local context, including population demographics and political climate, also drives projects' efforts to serve infants and toddlers and their families. Although these factors influence projects in countless ways, some themes emerge across the projects in this study. This section explores

[10] Staff at other, smaller projects in this study also provide these types of services, but the case managers or outreach workers almost always have additional classroom responsibilities.

how the nine projects are responding to some of the external forces that most affect them and their participants.

Projects' Services and Staffing Strategies are Tailored to the Special Characteristics and Needs of the Families Served

A theme common to these projects is their effort to tailor services to the special characteristics and needs of the families served. Some Even Start projects serving infants and toddlers must accommodate the needs of a clearly identifiable population, such as the migrant farmworker families served by the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center. This project is deliberately located at the center of a migrant community, and is constantly expanding its services into evenings and weekends to serve more families who work in the fields on weekdays. The project also adjusts for seasonal crop cycles by growing or shrinking its services and allowing regularly returning families to move to the top of the waiting list. One project staff member explained that many migrant parents set goals for themselves and their young children according to regional crop cycles, so staff must gear up to help families achieve personal milestones before they move to their next destination. Other projects take into account local demographics by consolidating services through co-location and providing transportation to rural or otherwise scattered populations.

Recognizing that Even Start families have multiple needs and problems, some projects also set up mechanisms to accommodate families experiencing temporary crises or turbulence that impedes their attendance at the program. For example, parents at the Webster-Groves project can temporarily assign responsibility for their child to another adult while they attend off-site appointments in an emergency. Without that option, children would have to leave their early childhood classrooms to accompany their parents. Other projects allow families to take short leaves of absence from the program when family circumstances require it.

Projects' staffing strategies also reflect attention to the characteristics of the population served. To increase parents' comfort level and build their trust, the projects make efforts to hire staff from the community who understand and have the respect of participating families. Projects also seek to hire staff that speak the primary language of the children and families served in the project.

Projects Whose Participants Receive Public Assistance Are Responding to the Implications of Welfare Reform

The responsibility of Even Start projects to serve families who are "most in need" means that many projects are in contact with states' welfare systems.[11] Following the enactment of the federal welfare reform legislation in 1996, states have undertaken efforts to reform their public assistance programs. For the most part, these changes focus on moving families from welfare to work, toughening eligibility restrictions and sanctions, and discouraging long-term or repeat periods of dependency. Because these changes are very new, Even Start projects are just beginning to consider the implications for their project design, services, and participants.

Although the implications of welfare reform differ from state to state, some central issues are most salient for families with infants and toddlers who are participating in Even Start. First, projects are struggling with the challenge of helping their participants meet tough new work requirements without fundamentally changing the nature of their family literacy efforts. Under pressure to find employment quickly, welfare recipients and their caseworkers may be wary of programs such as Even Start, which focus on education and whole family development over a multi-year period. To serve these participants, some Even Start projects are implementing or considering changes in their adult education components, incorporating a more vocational focus into their literacy efforts and strengthening ties to vocational schools, employment placement and training programs, and local employers. For projects that receive significant funding from local and/or state welfare offices to serve welfare recipients, changes such as these take on increased importance.

The projects are also discovering that the advent of welfare reform may put new stresses on services for infants and toddlers. Parents who must work during the day will need child care for this period, as well as for adult education and parenting classes scheduled in the evenings and on weekends. In response to these needs and the short supply of child care services for infants and toddlers in most communities, several projects are expanding their infant and toddler services to accommodate more children and longer hours. Projects with high numbers of participants in the welfare system also find themselves educating families—and often trying to allay fears—about the implications of welfare reform. At Chicago Commons, Even Start participants have written letters to representatives and have testified at state hearings on the issue of welfare reform.

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[11] Although all Even Start participants at the study sites are low-income, participants in some projects are not enrolled in welfare programs. Some families are ineligible; others, particularly recent immigrants, fear deportation or hold cultural beliefs that deter them from seeking government assistance.

Local Evaluation and Outcomes in the Nine Projects[12]

All nine projects conduct an annual independent evaluation of their Even Start program, as mandated in federal Even Start legislation. For the most part, the evaluators are employed by an institution of higher education and have backgrounds in early childhood education, family literacy, or related fields. Projects' evaluations typically outline project goals and measure the degree to which goals were achieved or progress was made. Most evaluation reports consist of process indicators (e.g., participation and attendance rates, types of services provided), quantitative outcomes (e.g., test scores, survey results, GED attainment), and, in some cases, qualitative data on outcomes (e.g., anecdotal evidence of positive changes in families participating in the program).

To assess the effects of their services on participants, projects rely on many methods and instruments—some commercially produced and some locally developed. In general, projects' evaluations feature very little, if any, information about infants and toddlers. Most evaluation efforts are directed toward measuring the skills and abilities of children age three to five, and those of the adults in Adult Basic Education, GED preparation, or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. It seems that infant and toddler results are not generally reported for three reasons: (1) most of the developmentally appropriate assessments of infants and toddlers used by the projects are not easily aggregated; (2) projects are reluctant to use the same types of easily reported pre- and post-test instruments that are often used to assess the progress of older children; and (3) projects face resource constraints that force them to make strategic choices about the focus of evaluation efforts. Although a few projects do include data on infants and toddlers in their evaluation reports, these data consist of analyses of pre- and post-test scores on measures of developmental progress for all participating children, and are not broken down by children's age.

The nine projects do, however, demonstrate what could be a promising strategy for tracking long-term outcomes for infants and toddlers. About half of the projects in this study work with school systems to follow the progress of Even Start children, many of whom entered the program as infants or toddlers, through kindergarten and early elementary school. However, few distinguish between children who entered the program as infants and toddlers and those who entered the program at age three or four. This seems to be due primarily to the small number of children tracked. The nine

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[12] Because the focus of this report is on infants and toddlers, this section discusses only briefly the evaluation of projects' adult literacy education programs or early childhood education for children age three and older.

projects also demonstrate promising strategies for assessing changes in the parenting skills and knowledge of parents, including those with infants and toddlers. These strategies are described below.

Few Projects Report Results of Infant and Toddler Assessments as Data for Program Evaluation

As noted earlier, assessment of infants and toddlers is an important part of all nine projects' early childhood programs. However, very few projects aggregate and report the results of infant and toddler assessments in their program evaluations. Rather, project staff use infant and toddler assessment results primarily to screen for developmental problems and to inform individually tailored instruction, special intervention, and communication with parents about developmentally appropriate experiences and expectations for children.

Project staff and evaluators cite many reasons for not including data on infants and toddlers in program evaluation reports. A primary reason is that the categories of data that project staff collect on infants and toddlers do not lend themselves easily to aggregation and reporting. Most projects assess the progress of infants and toddlers using some combination of observational records, developmental checklists or screens, feedback from parents, work portfolios, narrative reports by early childhood staff, and daily behavior records. This multi-faceted approach, which recognizes the speed and complexity of early child development, the wide range of normal variation in patterns and rates of development, and the extent to which a young child's behavior at any given time is affected by the child's physiological state (e.g., hungry, sleepy, afraid), mirrors the principles of appropriate assessment set forth in the research on the developmental assessment of infants and toddlers (Greenspan & Meisels, 1996). However, this approach also fails to yield results that are easily aggregated.

In contrast, instruments such as the Preschool Language Scale-3, the Preschool Inventory, and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test—all designed for children no younger than 2.5 years of age—produce scores that are easily aggregated and reported, and provide tangible indications of progress. However, several projects cited reservations about using these types of instruments to assess the progress of infants and toddlers. Indeed, current research (Greenspan & Meisels, 1996, p. 15) warns against using such testing methods with infants and toddlers:

> Under pressure to produce quick formulations or 'scores,' professionals have often called on their experiences with procedures and instruments developed for assessing selected competencies and skills in older children. These procedures and instruments can often yield misleading information. They are not built on a model of how the infant and young child develop within the family; they do not reflect an understanding of the specific types of difficulties and developmental challenges that children and families face in the first three years

of life; and they do not represent the best ways to observe and assess the dynamic developmental process as it occurs in infancy and early childhood.

Resource constraints is another factor that limits projects' focus on infants and toddlers, according to the projects visited in this study. Because the accurate assessment of early development is far more complex and involved than administering pre- and post-tests, many projects cannot spare the time and resources necessary to include such data as part of their overall program evaluation. In Oklahoma, for example, evaluation staff in the past spent weeks in infant and toddler classrooms conducting observations and recording children's progress. The project has since limited these observation efforts to the classrooms of older children, due to the time-consuming and thus expensive nature of observation, record-keeping, and analysis at the aggregate level. The projects emphasize that, with limited resources for evaluation, comprehensive evaluation of infants and toddlers for reporting purposes is not a priority.

A few projects have managed to include data for infants and toddlers in their evaluation reports; however, these data consist of analyses of pre- and post-test scores on measures of developmental progress for all participating children, and do not include analyses specific to infants and toddlers. Examples of evaluation findings that include data on infants and toddlers include the following:

- The Jefferson County evaluation reports post-test data on the Developmental Profile II for all Even Start children between the ages of six months and five years. The evaluation found that at the end of the 1995-96 program year, 82 percent of children who participated in the program met or exceeded norms for physical development, 96 percent met or exceeded norms for self-help skills, 89 percent met or exceeded norms for social skills, and 77 percent met or exceeded norms for academic and communication skills. The evaluator defined the lower cut-off for normal as five months below chronological age, as determined by national norms. The data for infants and toddlers were not analyzed separately from the data for older children and information on children's pre-test scores was not included in the evaluation report.

- The Decker evaluation uses the Early Learning Assessment Profile (E-LAP) to assess the progress of Even Start children aged six to 36 months and the Learning Assessment Profile (LAP) to assess the progress of children from 36 months to five years. These instruments test gross and fine motor skills, cognitive and language development, self-help skills, social/personal skills, and prewriting skills (for children age four and older). The evaluator used a regression model to create a hypothetical comparison group to control for the normal growth and development that children would experience without Even Start. A comparison of E-LAP/LAP gains with normal gains expected over time showed that in 1995-96 the Even Start program enhanced children's overall development by 22 percent over and above the projected normal rate of growth.

Tracking Infants' and Toddlers' Performance through School Is a Promising Strategy that Carries Its Own Challenges

The nine projects do, however, demonstrate what could be a promising strategy for tracking long-term outcomes for infants and toddlers. About half of the projects in this study work with school systems to follow the progress of Even Start children, many of whom entered the program as infants or toddlers, through kindergarten and early elementary school. These projects seek to measure program effects by comparing the performance (academic, social, physical, and emotional) of former Even Start children with that of their classmates who did not participate in the program. Although most projects do not distinguish between children who entered the program as infants and toddlers and those who entered the program at age three or four, this could be a promising strategy for assessing the long-term impact of infant and toddler participation in Even Start. Projects' failure to distinguish between those children who began services as infants and toddlers and those who began services at later ages seems to be due primarily to the small number of children tracked. This, in turn is influenced by the challenges of working with school districts, schools, and teachers to collect data on former participants and the resource-intensive nature of these efforts.

To collect data on former Even Start participants, projects need the cooperation of school districts, schools, and/or individual teachers. Unsupportive or overburdened offices and individuals can make longitudinal tracking impossible, as many projects have discovered. One project has been able to interview classroom teachers successfully because many had been students of the project evaluator, a professor at a local university. At another project, the evaluator recognized that his status as an outsider in the district would necessitate a liaison for collecting information from teachers. The project relies on the district's special needs coordinator, who already had ties with the Even Start project, to collect classroom data.

Tracking Even Start children through school is also time consuming, and thus expensive. The evaluator for the Oklahoma City project estimates that it takes several weeks to collect, analyze, and report data for children from just one site. Projects that serve higher numbers of children, or whose Even Start "graduates" disperse into many different elementary schools, face an even greater demand on their time. One implication of the time-consuming nature of longitudinal assessment is that it ties up resources that could be used for other evaluation efforts. As a result, large, well-funded projects with many evaluation resources, such as the Decker Family Development Center, may be able to develop more comprehensive tracking systems. The evaluator for Decker, for example, has recently collected data on test scores, grades, attendance, family demographics, special education placement, and other indicators for 1,200 kindergarten children. Comparisons will be made among children who had been

enrolled in Even Start, in Head Start, and in no preschool programming. In contrast, most other projects sample far fewer children and limit their data collection to teacher questionnaires and/or some indicators of academic performance. Sample efforts include the following:

- A 1995 study of Early Education Services in Vermont tracked 21 children who received services from infancy as part of the federal Comprehensive Child Development Program; four of these children were considered Even Start participants. The study found that kindergarten teachers judged 80 percent of the children as either definitely ready for school or ready with a little extra support. Children's readiness was assessed in the areas of physical well-being, social confidence, language richness, emotional development, standards of appropriate conduct, general knowledge, and overall readiness.

- The 1995-96 evaluation of the Webster-Groves project collected teacher ratings of 27 former Even Start participants in kindergarten through the third grade in the areas of number skills, visual skills, fine motor skills, auditory skills, and language skills. No significant differences between Even Start and non-Even Start students were detected, except in the area of visual skills, in which Even Start students were ranked slightly lower than non-Even Start students. This parity is considered an indicator of success given the very needy population served by the project.

- The 1995-96 evaluation of the Oklahoma City project tracked 17 Even Start graduates through the third grade. Nine of 11 Even Start graduates currently enrolled in kindergarten were ranked by their teachers as average, above average, or excellent, compared to their peers on overall academic performance. Even Start graduates in the primary grades also compared favorably to their classmates. The mean composite score on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills of the three second-grade Even Start graduates was 34 percentile points higher than their non-Even Start classmates. The mean composite score of the three third-grade graduates was seven percentile points higher than their classmates.

- At the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo project, staff are just beginning to track the classroom performance of former Even Start participants, including those who participated in the program as infants and toddlers. Preliminary findings from teacher interviews suggest that former Even Start children have strong English skills and are doing well in school, relative to nonparticipants in Even Start. Next year, when the first Even Start graduates enter the third grade, the project will be able to compare these children's scores on the third-grade Texas Assessment of Academic Skills to those of other students.

Projects Have Developed Some Promising Approaches to Overcoming Challenges in Measuring Program Effects on Parenting Knowledge and Skills

Assessing parents' skills, behaviors, and beliefs about parenting and interacting with their children is a sensitive and value-laden task (Powell, 1996). Projects use a number of instruments for measuring parents' understanding of their role as a nurturer and teacher for their child, including both locally developed and pre-packaged instruments.

Many of the projects have found that some pre-packaged parenting tests and questionnaires may be inappropriate for assessing their Even Start parents. For example, staff at the Oklahoma City project and the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo project, two projects serving low-income, immigrant Hispanic families, have found that the Home Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) is inappropriate for the families they serve. Staff at these projects believe that the test is biased against low-income families because the majority of questions are about the number and types of formal learning materials that children have access to in the home, including magazines, books, and toys. Staff also voiced concerns about questions that address the frequency with which children see their relatives, who in many cases still live in the country of origin, and questions about the fathers' role in caregiving, which is in part culturally determined. As a result, the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo project decided against using the HSQ with their participants and has chosen to use the Bowdoin Parenting Questionnaire instead. At the end of the 1995-96 program year, about half of all parents with pre- and post-test scores on this measure showed gains. The Oklahoma City project addresses this challenge by supplementing the HSQ with a survey that asks parents about any changes they have made in their home as a result of Even Start services. Frequent answers to this questionnaire at the end of the 1995-96 program year included "play more with my children," "read with my children," "be more patient with my children," "talk more with my children," and "spend more time with my children."

Although some projects have had success with locally developed parenting surveys, others have experienced problems. For example, the evaluator at the Jefferson County Public Schools project found that the pre-test results from a parenting survey were consistently inflated by parents who were reluctant to provide honest answers about their parenting habits (e.g., how often they took their children to the library). As a result, post-tests were showing few gains and some decreases in parenting measures. The evaluator has now developed a "reflective form" administered to parents toward the end of each Even Start program year. Although this has not completely eliminated the problem of response inflation, the project director believes that it provides a more accurate picture of project effects. Other projects also indicated that parents tend to inflate their responses to instruments administered early in their involvement with Even Start. Some project directors speculated that this

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may be due to parents' initial wariness of the project and project staff. These directors believe that parents need time before they can feel comfortable answering surveys honestly.

In response to the challenges involved in measuring parenting skills, knowledge, and behaviors—particularly in culturally diverse settings—the projects demonstrate several innovative approaches to assessment. Some examples include:

- Families at the Decker Family Development Center are pre- and post-tested to determine their functioning level (ranging from minimal to profound at-risk functioning) according to their self-assessment in three domains: personal/family, educational, and self-sufficiency. Staff also assign families a functioning level based on their perceptions. Decker evaluates changes in individual and overall functioning levels for families during each program year. In the 1995-96 program year, about 13 percent of families showed improvements in overall family functioning on this scale. Staff suggest that many families whose functioning levels decreased on this measure did not actually lose ground but gained a better self-awareness of their risk levels.

- Staff at the Even Start projects in West Feliciana and Webster-Groves observe parent-child interactions during PACT time. Staff use the Nurturing Behavior Checklist and the Adult-Child Interaction Rating Scale (respectively) to guide their observations and analysis of behaviors such as reading to a child, making positive statements to a child, and responding to a child's request for assistance. According to staff observations at West Feliciana, 55 percent of Even Start parents implemented at least three suggested parenting techniques during the 1995-96 program year. In the same year, parents at Webster-Groves made statistically significant average gains on the Adult-Child Interaction Rating Scale. Results from these assessments inform staff planning for parent-teacher conferences, future PACT time activities, home visits, and parenting classes.

- Parents at the San Jose Mission project keep portfolios of their work and personal reflections on parenting education, adult literacy classes, and interactions with their children. The portfolios include worksheets on goal-setting, parenting practices, and journal writing. Both staff and parents review portfolios monthly; parents assess their own progress and staff provide feedback and advice.

These results do not distinguish between parents of infants and toddlers and parents of older children, primarily because in the projects studied many of the parents of infants and toddlers also have older children who are program participants.

Policy Recommendations

The findings presented in this report illustrate the issues and challenges faced by promising Even Start projects that serve infants and toddlers and the strategies that they use to overcome those challenges. But these projects—and all of their Even Start peers—operate in a larger policy context that is shaped by many players at federal, state, and local levels. Our analysis of the study findings has identified major challenges facing the nine projects and yielded a set of policy recommendations to help strengthen Even Start Family Literacy projects serving infants and toddlers and their families. These recommendations suggest roles for both the U.S. Department of Education and the Even Start State Coordinators who currently administer the program.

Encourage Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Infuse Early Childhood Development Concepts and Strategies into All Aspects of Family Literacy Programming

Projects report that parents of infants and toddlers often participate in Even Start initially to meet their own needs for educational advancement and child care. While these are important objectives, the promising projects reviewed in this study also help parents discover their role as their children's teachers through constant, integrated opportunities to learn, observe, practice, and internalize ways to support infants and toddlers as learners. As research continues to make the case for enriched learning opportunities through parent-child interactions during the first three years of life, projects' work in parenting education takes an even more essential role in breaking cycles of poverty and illiteracy. To maximize the benefit of Even Start services to families with infants and toddlers, the U.S. Department of Education and Even Start State Coordinators should encourage projects serving this age group to infuse early childhood development concepts and strategies into all aspects of family literacy programming, if they are not already doing so. Even Start State Coordinators also may wish to provide technical assistance on this topic, based on the experiences of the nine projects highlighted in this report.

Encourage Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Form Linkages with Other Providers of Services Needed for Healthy Infant and Toddler Development

The promising Even Start projects in this sample use several strategies to ensure that families with infants and toddlers receive the services needed for healthy family functioning and infant and toddler development, including conducting sensitive needs assessments, forming strong linkages with

providers of services needed by infants and toddlers and their families, and conducting family-centered case management. Due to the vulnerability and complex needs of infants and toddlers, the U.S. Department of Education and Even Start State Coordinators should encourage all projects serving this age group to explore such strategies and enter into meaningful collaborative relationships with key local providers on either a formal or informal basis, if they are not already doing so. Even Start State Coordinators also may wish to provide technical assistance to projects on identifying such providers and on developing strong working relationships with them.

Encourage Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Maintain High Staff-to-Child Ratios and Small Group Sizes

Staff at the nine projects stressed the importance of providing infants and toddlers with one-on-one attention and nurturing to enhance emergent literacy and overall development. To this end, projects attempted to provide a large staff-to-child ratio, given fiscal constraints. Among projects with a separate infant classroom (typically for children between six and 18 months), most provided a staff-child ratio of 3:1, consistent with recommendations in the field. Most toddler classrooms and mixed-age classrooms serving both infants and toddlers provided a staff-child ratio of 3:1 or 4:1, also consistent with standards in the field. Research also suggests the importance of small overall group size when providing services to infants and toddlers. As a group, the projects visited were less successful in meeting guidelines for the field in this area. To encourage projects serving infants and toddlers to meet high standards for both staff-to-child ratios and group size, the U.S. Department of Education or Even Start State Coordinators may wish to issue guidance on this topic.

Help Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Access Training Opportunities Specific to Working with This Age Group

Recent ESIS data show that the vast majority of Even Start projects now serve infants and toddlers. However, some of the projects in this sample report difficulties finding affordable and accessible training on approaches for working with this age group. This issue is of utmost importance because the experience of these nine projects suggests that the majority of staff working with infants and toddlers have neither extensive experience nor certification as early childhood teachers. Given their access to state-level resources and ability to convene early childhood staff from multiple projects, Even Start State Coordinators may wish to consider coordinating such infant and toddler training opportunities for Even Start early childhood staff at the state and/or regional levels.

Provide Guidance to Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers on Strategies for Evaluating Project Outcomes for This Age Group

In general the projects in this sample struggled with strategies for evaluating outcomes for infants and toddlers. To help projects with this challenging task, the U.S. Department of Education may wish to consider convening a panel of experts on early childhood assessment issues to develop guidance on this topic. Technical assistance on implementing such guidance could be provided by the Even Start State Coordinators or through the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers.

Help Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Secure Appropriate Facilities for Serving This Age Group

Several projects in the study sample cited problems obtaining adequate space and/or appropriate facilities for serving infants and toddlers. This problem is not unique to Even Start programs. In a recent report on financing child care, Anne Mitchell and colleagues (1997) discuss the challenges of improving or expanding facilities for early care and education. Their report highlights several promising strategies for addressing these challenges at the state and local levels, including the use of tax exempt bonds and state grant and loan programs. Even Start State Coordinators could help Even Start projects serving infants and toddlers to address facility issues by building awareness of such strategies, as well as of any existing state programs that could assist them in their efforts to obtain or improve early childhood facilities.

Help Even Start Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers to Accommodate the Challenges of Welfare Reform While Maintaining a Focus on Family Literacy

As they respond to the enactment of federal welfare reform in 1996, states are fundamentally altering their welfare systems to eliminate long-term dependency and to move adult recipients into employment. The early experiences of the nine sites visited suggest that Even Start projects serving welfare families will need to be able to make changes in their services—such as incorporating a job-readiness or pre-employment focus into their adult education services or scheduling classes in the evenings or on weekends to accommodate working participants—in order for parents on public assistance to continue in the program. Infants and toddlers whose parents cannot participate in Even Start will miss out on the potentially powerful early learning experiences that projects can offer. Even Start State Coordinators can help projects to address the challenges of welfare reform by providing

information on the specific work and/or training requirements for their state's welfare reform initiative, and technical assistance on how projects can modify their programs to help families to continue to pursue their literacy goals while meeting these requirements.

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Appendix A

Profiles of the Nine Case Study Sites

Characteristics of the Nine Even Start Projects in the Study Sample

Project Characteristic	Chicago Commons Employment Training Center, Chicago, IL	Decker Family Development Center, Barberton, OH	Early Education Services, Brattleboro, VT	Family Service Center, West Feliciana Parish, LA	Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY	Oklahoma City Even Start, Oklahoma City, OK	Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, Alamo, TX	San Jose Mission Family Learning Center, Dover, FL	Webster Groves Even Start, St. Louis, MO
Year of Even Start Funding (1996-97 Program Year)	6	7	8	6	7	7	6	4[1]	7
Primarily Urban	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓
Primarily Rural			✓	✓			✓	✓	
Serves a Limited English Proficient Population	✓					✓	✓	✓	
Part of a Larger Organization Serving Families	✓	✓	✓						
Located in a School Building				✓	✓	✓	✓		
Collaborates with Head Start	✓	✓	✓[2]	✓	✓			✓	✓
Collaborates with a Welfare Agency or Program	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
Health Services Available On Site	✓	✓		✓		✓			

[1] This project receives funding through the federal Migrant Education Even Start program.

[2] This project receives an Early Head Start grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to provide programs and services for children prebirth to age three years and their families.

Chicago Commons Employment Training Center
Chicago, Illinois

Community Context

The Employment Training Center is a program of Chicago Commons, a city-wide, nonprofit human services agency. The center is located in the West Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. Its primary focus is the provision of adult education to community residents who are educationally disadvantaged and dependent on public assistance. Even Start is integrated into the center's services, which include on-site adult and early childhood classes, a health clinic, case management, career counseling, and a toy and book lending library. During the 1996-97 program year, the center served 209 adults and 54 children. Of these, 47 of the adults and all 54 of the children—35 three-, four-, and five-year-olds and 19 infants and toddlers—were Even Start participants. Center participants are primarily African American and Hispanic; most receive public assistance. The average education level of Even Start participants is 9.3 years. All Even Start adult participants are female.

Activities and Services

Even Start parents attend classes at the center 20 hours a week, four hours a day, while their children are in an early childhood classroom on-site. Services are offered year-round.

Adult education. A four-week life skills class, offered in English and Spanish, serves as parents' orientation to the program. During the course, participants are assessed for literacy skills, screened for health problems, counseled regarding goals and employment plans, and guided to needed off-site services. Adults are then placed in English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education, or General Educational Development (GED) credential preparation classes, depending on their language proficiency and academic skill level.

Parenting education. Parents receive instruction on child development and parenting techniques through three avenues: (1) life skills classes spend about four class sessions on parenting; (2) parents participate in biweekly parenting support groups in English or Spanish; and (3) parents can seek individual guidance from staff of the Lekotek center or on-site health clinic.

Early childhood education. Infants and toddlers and preschoolers receive early childhood education services five days a week. The curriculum developed by the on-site early childhood specialist stresses child-directed learning and emergent literacy. Staff regularly observe and record children's development, using developmental checklists adapted by the early childhood specialist to meet the needs of participating children. Early childhood staff meet regularly to discuss children's progress and educational strategies in areas such as social-emotional skills, large muscle development, small muscle development, and language development.

Other activities and services. Parents receive private parent and child interaction sessions in the on-site Lekotek toy and book lending library. Lekotek is a national program that uses play as the medium to teach parenting skills and promote children's literacy and healthy development. Most Even Start parents spend an hour every other week interacting with their children and the Lekotek instructor

in the center. Sessions include 45 minutes of parent-child play and 15 minutes of parent-staff discussion. Families may borrow developmentally appropriate toys and books from the center.

Families also receive the services of Employment Training Center case managers, who link participants to service providers and function as welfare case workers for many families. The center's "case staffing" approach brings together the entire staff in regular meetings to discuss specific families' progress and coordinate service strategies.

The project also offers home-based instructional services that focus on early childhood education and parent-child instruction.

Collaboration and Resources

Collaborators include the Illinois State Board of Education, the City Colleges of Chicago, the Lekotek parent-and-child program, and the Erie Family Health Clinic. A Head Start program is also located on site. Parents of Head Start children have access to center adult services, and the Head Start program gives priority to children of adults at the center.

Even Start funding provides $75,000 of the Employment Training Center's total annual budget of $600,000. The center's 1996-97 Even Start grant represented its sixth year of federal funding.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

The project evaluation collects data on children's scores on developmental screening tests, parent responses to a parenting skills questionnaire, and parent test score data on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). Indicators of success from the 1995-96 project evaluation include the following:

- Nineteen of 23 English-speaking adult participants made gains on the TABE reading test; 17 of 18 Spanish-speaking adult participants made gains on the CASAS reading test.

- Of the seven children who scored below average on the Denver Developmental Screening Test at program entry and who remained in the program long enough to be retested, five improved from below average to above average after being in Even Start for six months. One did not gain, and one refused to participate in the retest.

The evaluation also surveyed parents on parenting knowledge. Analysis of participant responses found that parents who had been in the program longer scored higher than newer participants on questions regarding knowledge of child development and questions regarding the amount of time that they spend in educational activities with their children.

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Barberton, Ohio

Community Context

The Decker Family Development Center occupies a former elementary school in Barberton, Ohio, a small city of about 30,000. The center is the result of a collaboration between the Barberton City Public Schools, The University of Akron, and Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron. The Even Start program is integrated into the center's education program and early intervention, health, and social services for families with young children. During the 1996-97 program year, the center served 275 adults and 350 children. Of these, 117 adults and 143 children—93 three-, four-, and five-year-olds and 50 infants and toddlers—were Even Start participants. About three-quarters of participating families at the center are headed by single mothers; almost all adult Even Start participants are female (96 percent in 1996-97). More than 80 percent of families served by the center are white; all but a few families speak English as their primary language. According to 1995-96 data, almost one-half of all adults served at the center function at or below a sixth-grade literacy level. Almost all families have annual incomes below $10,000.

Activities and Services

Decker offers adult and early childhood services five days a week year-round. Both adult and early childhood services are offered at a variety of times throughout the week to meet parents' schedules and needs.

Adult education. Decker offers Adult Basic Education, GED preparation, and pre-employment skills classes four days a week. Parents can choose to participate in morning or afternoon sessions, both of which meet for a total of three hours daily. In addition to these classes, adults can work independently on their literacy skills on computers located in a mobile unit stationed at Decker three days a week.

Parenting education. Parenting classes are offered three hours a day, once a week. Parents can choose from classes that meet on Mondays, Wednesdays, or Fridays. Parenting classes function both as an educational experience and as a support group for parents. The parenting teacher uses discussion, audiovisual programs, role playing, and craft activities to introduce and explore parenting topics and skills.

Early childhood education. Along with several Head Start classrooms and a developmental kindergarten, Decker operates four classrooms for children from birth through age three, including a Learning Center for infants and toddlers with special needs. Teachers create their curricula by drawing on several nationally recognized programs, including the High/Scope curriculum. Infant and toddler teachers stress the importance of early brain and language development, and model a language-rich environment by singing and talking to children during normal routines throughout the day. Children receive early childhood services while their parents participate in adult or parenting education services. Full-time services are also available for parents with extended child care needs.

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Other activities and services. Decker offers Parent and Child Together (PACT) time activities for parents and children once a week, in conjunction with parenting education classes. Before each PACT time, early childhood staff visit the parenting class to explain the upcoming PACT time activity and how it will connect to the principles of child development, emergent literacy, and parent-child interaction that parents are studying.

Families at Decker also receive home visits. Outreach workers conduct home visits on a regular basis to link participants to services at Decker and in the community. Families with children from birth to age three receive additional home visits twice a month from early childhood staff who have been trained in the Parents as Teachers curriculum.

Decker families can also receive: transportation services to and from the center and to special events; small grants and loans from the Decker Parent Council (funded through a grant from a local foundation); and on-site health care services, including pediatric care, mental health counseling, and speech, physical, and occupational screening and therapy from Children's Hospital staff. Adults may also participate in a work experience program funded through the Summit County Department of Human Services in which they "shadow" Decker staff to gain valuable pre-employment skills.

Collaboration and Resources

Aside from Decker's three primary collaborators (the hospital, university, and school district), approximately 20 additional agencies and individuals work directly with Decker families, either on-site or through a referral/contract arrangement.

Even Start provides about 13 percent of Decker's total $1.6 million budget (about one-third of which is provided through a child care contract with the state Department of Human Services). Decker's 1996-97 Even Start grant represented its seventh year of Even Start funding.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

Decker's evaluator has worked closely with the center since its inception, and has developed several innovative methods of assessing participants' progress. New efforts include a study that will collect longitudinal data on 1,200 children, including Decker participants and nonparticipants. The data will be analyzed to assess differences between these two groups through the third grade.

Indicators of success from the 1995-96 Even Start program evaluation include the following:

- About 13 percent of families showed overall improvements in family functioning, according to staff- and self-assessment on a five-point scale. Staff suggest that many families whose functioning levels decreased on this measure did not actually lose ground but gained a better self-awareness of their risk levels.

- Ninety-two percent of adults scored below the ninth-grade level on literacy pre-tests; at post-test, 85 percent scored below the ninth-grade. Similarly, 44 percent tested below the sixth-grade level on the pre-test, while only 29 percent did so on the post-test.

- Children between the ages of six months and five years showed evidence of enhanced development on the Learning Accomplishment Profile (LAP) and Early Learning Accomplishment Profile (E-LAP) that was, on average, 22 percent over and above normal growth. The LAP and E-LAP test gross and fine motor skills, cognitive and language development, self-help skills, social/personal skills, and prewriting skills (for children age four and older).

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Early Education Services
Brattleboro, Vermont

Community Context

Early Education Services is the umbrella organization that coordinates and implements a wide array of comprehensive services, including Even Start, for families with young children in Windham County, Vermont. Although the program is located in the town of Brattleboro and administered by the Brattleboro Town School District, the program serves all of Windham County, a large rural county that includes 23 towns. Over the last four years, the program has served 77 families through its Even Start program. About 30 families are served through Even Start at any given time; almost all children served are infants and toddlers although the program does serve children up to age eight. Although most of Early Education Services' direct services are home based, program staff link families to numerous community-based services. Program staff currently serve on advisory boards and task forces for 38 local agencies and programs, an indication of the organization's commitment to building strong relationships within the community.

Activities and Services

Program services are offered year-round and are primarily home based. An interdisciplinary team of professionals in social work, early childhood education, employment and training, and health care support the cadre of home visitors who provide early childhood education, parenting education, adult education, case management, and referral services on a weekly basis.

Adult education. Families enrolled in Even Start through Early Education Services have several adult education options, including weekly home visits from an Early Education Services literacy tutor, adult education classes provided by a local adult learning center, and an adult diploma program offered through the state of Vermont. The Early Education Services literacy tutor designs curricula according to each individual's needs, which may include basic literacy education, GED/adult diploma program preparation, or ESL instruction. Adult education also focuses on strengthening adults' sense of connectedness and membership in the community, as well as their parenting skills.

Parenting education. Parenting education is offered primarily during home visits and is tailored to the needs and interests of each family. To plan the sessions, Early Education Services home visitors draw on a comprehensive in-house library of curricula and resources on child development, parenting techniques, developmentally appropriate infant stimulation, and activities that reinforce and promote children's healthy development. Home visits also function as parent-child interaction sessions, with home visitors acting as facilitators and observers. Some parenting education is also offered during weekly or monthly playgroups and family activity sessions.

Early childhood education. Early Education Services directly provides early childhood education for infants and toddlers through its on-site Early Head Start classroom and an infant/toddler center at the Brattleboro high school. The program also operates a preschool that serves as a transitional service for children when they reach age three. Since most families served through Early Education Services use early childhood services located throughout the county, program staff help

connect families to high-quality child care providers in the community. Home visitors also provide early childhood education, as well as routine developmental assessments. The program also helps eligible families qualify for state child care subsidies and often pays any balance that families cannot afford.

Other activities and services. The wide array of services offered by Early Education Services include a state-funded newborn home visiting program, a residential substance abuse recovery program with a home visiting component, and other specialized supports in social work, health, and employment and training. Other services offered include: early screening and intervention services for children with special needs, an outreach and support program for men, recreational events and family outings, play groups, and case management for the state welfare-to-work program, Reach Up.

Collaboration and Resources

Early Education Services has formal collaborative agreements with a large number of local and state agencies, including those providing adult education, mental health services, welfare, child protection, early intervention and special needs services, early childhood education, and health care. The program's designation by the state as a Parent-Child Center has given it access to several state contracts, all of which pertain to serving infants and toddlers and their families.

Even Start provides about 8 percent of the Early Education Services total budget of approximately $1.5 million. The program's main funding source is an Early Head Start grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This grant has allowed the program to continue its services since the termination of a five-year Comprehensive Child Development Program grant in 1995. The program's 1996-97 Even Start grant represented its eighth and final year of Even Start funding.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

Evaluation of the Even Start program is conducted by the Early Education Services evaluation staff. Most data collection and analysis is used for the purpose of program improvement, staff development and accountability, and service planning to meet the needs of individual children and adults. Quantitative data are not a focus of this evaluation; although the program's collaborators may administer standardized tests, Early Education Services rarely does.

Some of the strongest evidence of the success of Early Education Services has been documented in a six-year study of families enrolled in the Comprehensive Child Development Program. All families originally enrolled in this program through Early Education Services in 1990 either had a mother who was pregnant or a child below age one. Of the 30 families included in the study, eight were formally enrolled as Even Start participants. All families in the study remained in the program for the full five years. Results show that although control group families started out better off in 1990, by 1996 Early Education Services families had higher income levels, reduced dependence on public assistance, higher rates of employment, and more indications of economic self-sufficiency, including automobile and telephone ownership. A study of the school readiness of the 21 children of these families who enrolled in kindergarten in the fall of 1995 found that kindergarten teachers judged 80

percent of the children as either definitely ready for school or ready with a little extra support. Children's readiness was assessed in the areas of physical well-being, social confidence, language richness, emotional development, standards of appropriate conduct, general knowledge, and overall readiness.

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The Family Service Center
West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana

Community Context

West Feliciana is a rural parish located about 50 miles outside of Baton Rogue. The parish has a relatively small population (under 10,000) and high rates of poverty. The school-based Family Service Center that houses the Even Start program is the area's main provider of health, mental health, adult education, and early childhood education services. It also serves as a referral service to link families to the few social services available in the parish. Parish residents face extreme isolation, with many families living in remote areas and often without transportation. In the 1996-97 program year, the Even Start Family Literacy program served 47 adults and 81 children—including 40 infants and toddlers. About one-third of adults have been previously identified as special education students; about one-third are single parents; almost all are female (46 of 47 in 1996-97).

Activities and Services

During the school year, the project offers adult and early childhood services at the Family Service Center four days a week for about five hours each day. Summer services are primarily home based.

Adult education. The project's adult education services focus on preparing students to obtain a GED credential. Classes use a variety of activities, often in ability groups, to strengthen academic skills. In response to welfare reform, project staff plan to broaden the adult literacy component next year to incorporate more vocational education within a literacy context.

Parenting education. Parenting education occurs during weekly structured sessions in two groups, one for older parents and one for younger parents. Teaching methods include guest speakers, video or audiotape programs, role playing, and crafts activities. Staff use a combination of commercial programs and lessons determined by participants' needs and requests.

Early childhood education. While parents are in class, their children participate in the infant/toddler program (which includes an infant classroom for children below age one and a toddler classroom for one- and two-year-olds), Head Start (for three-year-olds only), or elementary school. Staff do not follow a particular curriculum for infants or toddlers, but draw on different approaches based on the knowledge and experience of the project director. For toddlers, the daily schedule includes indoor and outdoor activities, weather permitting, and both group and individual activities.

Other activities and services. All families participate in parent-child time, whether their children are in the infant/toddler program, Head Start, or in other classrooms at the elementary school. On an individually determined schedule, parents spend several hours a week in their children's classrooms, typically reading to their own and other children and playing with them. Staff observe and record parents' interactions to inform individual and group parenting instruction.

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Home visiting is offered on a weekly basis at the beginning and end of the school year and during the summer. Visits focus on parenting education based on The Nurturing Program, which provides ideas, examples, and activities for parents and their children in many areas, and teaches alternatives to corporal punishment as a form of discipline.

Other support services include: primary health care and health education through weekly pediatric clinics provided by local physicians; full-time care provided by two registered nurses; counseling provided by two part-time social workers and a school psychologist; a Toy Lending Library; emergency assistance from The Salvation Army; and transportation.

Collaboration and Resources

The project's primary collaborators include Project Independence, the local welfare reform program that contracts with Even Start to provide literacy training and transportation to its clients; Head Start, which has classrooms co-located with Even Start; several local physicians; and school programs, including school health and special education.

The project's 1996-97 Even Start grant represented its sixth year of federal Even Start funding. This grant supplied about $140,000 or 45 percent of the total $311,993 budget. Other funds and in-kind contributions are provided by the school district, public health department, Project Independence, Medicaid, the Children's Trust Fund (a state child abuse prevention program), and Head Start.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

The project documents participant progress primarily through child and parent portfolios. Children's portfolios include observation sheets, developmental checklists, narrative reports, and work samples. Parents' portfolios also contain work samples, observation sheets, and narrative reports, as well as personal goal sheets and test scores. Indicators of success from the 1995-96 evaluation include the following:

- Eighty percent of Even Start parents participated in their child's classroom on a weekly basis, all parents participated in at least two parent-teacher conferences, and all parents reported reading a book a week to or with their child.

- According to staff observations, 55 percent of Even Start parents implemented at least three suggested parenting techniques.

- All parents met the literacy goals they developed as part of their literacy plans. Also, of the first cohort of ten graduates, three obtained jobs, two are no longer on public assistance, and seven will participate in the Project Independence Work Program. Two anticipated receiving a GED within several months of the evaluation survey.

- According to staff observations and parent report, all children exhibited indicators of enhanced self-esteem, including an increased willingness to explore new environments or increased ability to relate to other children and adults.

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Jefferson County Public Schools Even Start Project
Louisville, Kentucky

Community Context

The Jefferson County Public Schools Even Start project operates five Even Start sites in Louisville, Kentucky. Although each site serves a slightly different neighborhood and population, most participants receive public assistance and almost all qualify for the federal free lunch program. Many reside in public housing projects, subsidized housing, or homeless facilities. The average educational attainment level of adults participating in the project is below the tenth grade. A small but growing number of families are recent immigrants for whom English is a second language.

Most of the five Even Start sites are located in Title I elementary schools, many of which also house state-funded Family Resource Centers that provide comprehensive services to the community. During the 1996-97 program year, the five sites served a total of 86 infants and toddlers, 106 three- and four-year-olds, and 141 adults. Almost all adults served were female (139 of 141).

Activities and Services

The Jefferson County Even Start sites use an adapted Kenan model of service delivery, with adults and children arriving at the site together, spending meals and PACT time together, and then separating for adult and parenting education and early childhood education. Participants attend from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., four days a week, with Fridays reserved for staff development, team planning, and home visits. Sites follow the school year schedule, with a six-week summer program consisting primarily of home visits.

Adult education. Adult education services are highly individualized to accommodate the wide range of ability levels among students. Sites encourage student-directed and student-paced learning, and offer academic activities that are relevant to adults' lives, such as math activities focused on personal budgeting and reading activities focused on employment and parenting information. Adults take GED practice tests frequently to assess areas of strength, as well as areas in which they are improving or need more work.

Parenting education. Parenting classes use several formats, including hands-on activities, presentations, and discussions on many topics, including nutrition, health, career planning, welfare reform, postsecondary education, and self-esteem issues. Adult literacy instructors coordinate with early childhood staff to coordinate parenting topics with adult education classes and PACT sessions.

Early childhood education. Each site houses a classroom for three- and four-year-olds and an infant/toddler room for children between the ages of six weeks and three years. Classroom design, curricula, and instructional approaches are informed primarily by the High/Scope infant and toddler curriculum. Infant and toddler rooms follow a regular routine that includes child-directed play, meals, nap-time, and parent-child interaction. Early childhood staff emphasize communication with parents; staff give parents a written record of children's behaviors, milestones, feedings, changings, and other routine activities each day.

Other activities and services. Each site offers PACT time on a daily basis, usually in conjunction with parenting education. Staff report that PACT time is rarely a structured activity, but usually a child-directed parent and child play time. During this period, parents are encouraged to follow their child's lead and talk with them about what they are doing. Adult and infant and toddler instructors communicate frequently about PACT time and try to create linkages between PACT experiences and topics of discussion in parenting and adult education classes.

Project staff also conduct home visits at least twice during the school year and weekly during the summer. A project administrator has developed home visiting activity packages that home visitors use in the summer. The packages include toys, activities, parenting information, adult education worksheets, journal writing materials, and other supplies.

The project also provides transportation to and from each site, and the state-funded, school-linked Family Resource Centers provide direct services and referrals for families' medical, mental health, personal, and social service needs.

Collaboration and Resources

The school district and the Kentuckiana Metroversity Educational Opportunity Center, a consortium of local institutions of higher education, are Even Start applicant partners. The project also benefits from relationships with about 20 additional collaborators, including Family Resource Centers, the National Center for Family Literacy, Head Start, and several district programs, including the Family Education Program and Title I.

Federal Even Start funds represent a little less than half of the project's total budget of $241,250 for all five sites. The project's 1996-97 grant represented its seventh year of Even Start funding.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

The project evaluator serves as the evaluator for all Even Start projects in the state. Indicators of success from the 1995-96 evaluation include the following:

- Twenty-two adults passed the GED while in Even Start or after exiting; 1 adult completed a high school degree.

- Eighty-two percent of children between the ages of six months and five years met or exceeded norms for physical development as determined by the Developmental Profile II, 96 percent met or exceeded norms for self-help skills, 89 percent met or exceeded norms for social skills, and 77 percent met or exceeded norms for academic and communication skills. (The lower cut-off for normal was defined as five months below chronological age.) Even Start children aged three to five also showed overall gains on the High/Scope Child Observation Record (COR). Eighty percent showed gains or mastery in the area of initiative, 90 percent showed gains or mastery in the area of social relations, 88 percent showed gains or mastery in the area of creative

representation, 74 percent showed gains or mastery in the area of music and movement, 84 percent showed gains or mastery in the area of language and literacy, and 86 percent showed gains or mastery in the area of logic and mathematics.

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Oklahoma City Even Start Project
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Community Context

The Oklahoma City Even Start project is located in one wing of an elementary school in the predominantly Latino southwest sector of Oklahoma City. The project serves approximately 60 families at any one time, and more than 100 families are on the project's waiting list. During the 1996-97 program year 102 children were served, including 22 infants and toddlers, 48 preschoolers, and 32 children in kindergarten and first grade. All of the adults served by the project are female and almost all are Latina. About 85 percent of participating families speak Spanish as their native language. Although all families have very low incomes, most do not receive public assistance because of cultural values or ineligibility (most families are intact, two-parent households).

Activities and Services

The project offers adult, parenting, and early childhood education classes for three hours a day, four days a week, with Thursdays reserved for staff planning and professional development. Home visits generally take place in the afternoons. Summer classes and activities vary according to participation levels and any special programs the project is able to arrange with collaborators.

Adult education. The project offers three adult education classes for students at varying levels of English proficiency and academic ability. Instruction includes a balance of large and small group activities and independent work by students toward their educational goals. Students in the advanced adult education classrooms have already completed their GED—most take the test in Spanish—and are continuing in the program to improve their English and pre-employment basic skills for career-track employment (such as banking, secretarial work) or to enable them to enter college.

Parenting education. Parenting education classes are offered for an hour each week and combine structured presentations with participant-generated discussion of personal concerns. Parenting classes also provide parents with ideas for simple, developmentally appropriate games and activities that they can carry out at home to stimulate their children's development.

Early childhood education. The Even Start program operates three early childhood classrooms, for children ages six weeks to two and a half years, two and a half to four years, and four and older. The early childhood curriculum stresses emergent literacy in a bilingual setting and is based on guidelines drawn from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), research on bilingual education, early childhood resource materials published by organizations such as the National Education Association and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the work of the project evaluator on emergent literacy. Early childhood staff focus on emergent literacy by describing and explaining as children play, asking questions, writing down children's words and reading them back, and using environmental print in the classroom. To assess children's progress, teachers are encouraged to observe the activities each child chooses, how the child makes choices and solves problems, and any new words or concepts the child demonstrates.

Other activities and services. PACT time is scheduled for one hour each week. During this time, parents join their children in the early childhood classrooms for a mix of group and individualized activities. Children and parents usually begin and end the session with circle time, including familiar songs, fingerplays, and other games, and spend the rest of the time in free play in the classroom learning areas. Early childhood staff use both English and Spanish during PACT time.

Even Start families receive two home visits each month: one from an Even Start staff person, and one from a Parents as Teachers home visitor. The Parents as Teachers home visitor uses a structured curriculum and usually brings developmentally appropriate toys into the home with her; the Even Start home visitor tailors activities to each family's needs, and shows parents creative ways to use household items as educational toys. Even Start and Parents as Teachers home visiting staff meet regularly to coordinate their services and discuss how they are meeting families' needs.

The program also offers: transportation to and from the site; developmental, health, and hearing screenings for children; and field trips and cultural activities for families.

Collaboration and Resources

The project collaborates with Parents as Teachers for home visits, and some staff training is provided by a child development specialist and a speech pathologist from the State Health Department. Other local and state-level partners include the local library, the community counseling center, a Latino community development agency, the state's Sooner Start early intervention program, Oklahoma City University, and the State Department of Education's Division of Lifelong Learning.

The project received $240,000 from Even Start in 1996-97, with a local match of $312,216. The 1996-97 program year was the project's seventh year of Even Start funding.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

Oklahoma City University has conducted the project's local evaluation every year since 1991. Some of the indicators of success from the 1995-96 evaluation include the following:

- Adults demonstrated an average gain of 3.88 points on the CASAS reading test; 20 adult women and four adult men completed the GED in English or Spanish.
- Adults demonstrated an average gain of 14 percentile points on the Gordon Personal Profile Inventory, a measure of adults' self-esteem.
- Children age three through five demonstrated post-test gains on the PSI, the Preschool Language Scale-3 (PLS-3), and a locally developed, observation-based assessment of children's language and literacy skills.
- Nine of 11 former Even Start participants currently enrolled in kindergarten were ranked by their teachers as average, above average, or excellent, compared to their peers on overall academic performance. Former Even Start participants in the primary

grades also compared favorably to their classmates. The mean composite score on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills of the three former participants in the second grade was 34 percentile points higher than that of their non-Even Start classmates. The mean composite score of the three former participants in the third grade was seven percentile points higher than that of their classmates.

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Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District Even Start Project
Alamo, Texas

Community Context

The Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District is a rural district located about 10 miles from the Mexican border in the Rio Grande Valley. It serves the three small adjoining communities of Pharr, San Juan, and Alamo, with a combined population of 48,000. Increased immigration from Mexico has fueled the growth of the district school population in recent years—from 14,000 in 1981 to 20,000 in 1995. Ninety-five percent of the students enrolled in the district are Hispanic, and 5 percent are white. The district suffers from high unemployment and is one of the poorest districts in the state. More than half of Even Start participants receive government assistance, about 40 percent are single-parent families, and almost all are limited English proficient. During the 1996-97 program year, the program served 103 adults (98 of whom were female) and 185 children, including 49 infants and toddlers, 66 preschoolers, and 70 school-age children. About 150 families are currently on a waiting list to participate in the program.

Activities and Services

The project offers year-round services for families at three sites that are centrally located within each of the three communities that comprise this tri-city district. Services in Alamo and Pharr are provided in local elementary schools. Services in San Juan are offered at a local community center. The project offers both morning and afternoon classes four days a week (Monday through Thursday), as well as some evening and Saturday classes. Many parents participate in both morning and afternoon classes, and some participate in classes at more than one site.

Adult education. The project offers a wide range of adult education classes, from beginning ESL to GED preparation. These classes are offered at each of the sites three days a week.

Parenting education. Parenting education is offered at each site once a week. The parenting curriculum alternates seasonally between the Bowdoin Method, a program that focuses primarily on child development, and Padres Con Poder, a regionally developed parent empowerment program designed to appeal to fathers, who otherwise may not be inclined to participate in a parenting education class. The Bowdoin program is used primarily in the fall and winter, and Padres Con Poder is used primarily in the spring and summer, when fathers' work schedules are more flexible.

Early childhood education. Early childhood education is offered four days a week at all sites. Children must be between the ages of six months and eight years to participate. All early childhood classes are bilingual; staff report speaking primarily in Spanish to the youngest children and introducing English gradually as the children become older. The early childhood curriculum stresses developmentally appropriate practices and is based primarily on resource materials from the NAEYC, Project Share (a locally developed bilingual preschool program), and Addison-Wesley (the Active Learning Series developed at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill). Through a collaborative arrangement with a community action agency and Head Start provider in Austin, staff are currently

receiving training on a new infant and toddler curriculum developed by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Other activities and services. Each site offers one hour of parent and child interaction time a week, usually in conjunction with a parenting education class. During this time, parents and children engage in structured learning activities together, such as making and reading family storybooks. Early childhood teachers assist in the planning of the interaction time, so that the sessions serve as an extension of the activities in which the children participate in their early childhood classrooms.

Families also receive monthly home visits from parent educators. Home-based instruction in all program components is available on a weekly basis for homebound parents (i.e., parents who are disabled or who care for disabled family members). Each site also operates a lending library for Even Start families that lends computers, adult literacy and children's software, children's storybooks, and parenting videos. Additionally, in response to participant requests, the project has arranged for two collaborators—Region One Adult Education Services and Texas A&M Extension Services—to provide supplemental classes for adults on topics such as citizenship, computer literacy, sewing, and nutrition. These classes are rotated among the sites.

Collaboration and Resources

The project's primary collaborators for the 1996-97 program year include Region One Adult Education Services, which provides evening adult education classes and a part-time Even Start adult education instructor, and the AmeriCorps Youth Harvest Program, which supplies volunteers who serve as part-time instructional assistants. Other collaborators include: the Texas Department of Human Services; the local Title VII Bilingual Education program; and several providers of technical assistance and training, including the University of Texas-Pan American, the Texas Family Literacy Assistance Center in Waco, and Child, Inc., a community action agency and Head Start grantee in Austin.

The project's 1996-97 Even Start grant represented its sixth year of federal funding. This grant of $210,000 accounts for almost half of the program's budget, with funds matched through in-kind contributions from the district.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

The 1995-96 evaluation measured changes in adult literacy, parenting behaviors, and children's school readiness. With pre- and post-testing on the CASAS, the evaluation found that more than two-thirds of participating adults made positive gains in literacy. The size of the gains was positively related to the length of participation in the program. In the area of parenting, the evaluation found that about half of all parents with pre- and post-test scores on the Bowdoin parenting questionnaire showed gains. All children (aged three to six) with pre- and post-test scores on the PSI also recorded increases, although only nine children had both pre- and post-test scores.

This year, the project is beginning to track the classroom performance of former Even Start students who were with the program for at least two years and to compare their achievement with that

of other students. Preliminary findings from teacher interviews suggest that former Even Start children have strong English skills and are doing well in school, relative to nonparticipants in Even Start. Next year the project will be able to begin tracking these children's scores on the third-grade Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.

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San Jose Mission Family Learning Center
Dover, Florida

Community Context

The San Jose Mission Family Learning Center is located in rural Dover, Florida, about 25 miles east of Tampa. The center, which houses a Migrant Education Even Start program, a Migrant/Seasonal Farmworker Program (Job Training Partnership Act, Section 402), and the district adult and community education program, is located on a 25-acre compound owned by the local Catholic diocese. A Migrant Head Start program and a Catholic Charities food and clothing bank are also on the compound, and an affordable housing development and community center are planned for construction. Many fruit and vegetable farms that employ migrant and seasonal farm workers from Mexico surround the mission. The community is generally poor, but the nearby metropolitan areas are experiencing an industrial boom.

During the 1996-97 program year the center's Even Start program served 43 adults and 60 children, including 19 infants and toddlers, 29 preschoolers, and 12 school-age children. Most participating adults are female (40 of 43 in 1996-97). The average literacy level of adults served by the center is sixth grade. Many families are recent immigrants from Mexico, and all are native Spanish speakers. The approximate average annual income of participating families is $7,000. None of the Even Start families receive public assistance.

Activities and Services

The mission's Even Start program offers year-round adult and early childhood services five hours a day, five days a week. Adult participants have significant responsibility and voice in program activities and services through representation on the project's Advisory Council, a highly active Even Start Parents' Committee, and monthly anonymous evaluations.

Adult education. English proficiency, GED attainment, and basic education skills for preparation for employment in long-term, steady positions are three primary goals of the Even Start adult education component. Parents receive adult education services organized around these goals for about three and a half hours each day, five days a week. During this time, adults participate in teacher-led activities or work individually at the computer lab or listening stations. Parents may also receive individual tutoring from one of several regular volunteer tutors.

Parenting education. Parenting education activities are offered one hour a day, five days a week. These activities include a weekly parent support group, a weekly parenting education class, and two weekly PACT times. Activities on the fifth day of each week rotate among Parent Committee meetings, guest speakers, and family socials. The parent support group addresses topics such as self-esteem, domestic violence, spousal relationships, and other family issues. The parenting education classes cover issues such as child development, child safety and nutrition, effective parenting techniques, and strategies for developing children's school readiness skills.

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Early childhood education. Children of parents enrolled in the Even Start program attend the early childhood program five hours a day, five days a week. The early childhood classroom serves 15 children ranging in age from six months to five years during the school year, and from six months to eight years during the summer. A separate area of the room is set aside for infants and toddlers. This area includes cribs, developmentally appropriate books and toys, soft foam-like structures for climbing and pulling up, and open floor space for crawling. Although the teachers use the High/Scope curriculum for preschoolers, they draw on the Addison-Wesley Active Learning Series and other resources to design activities specifically geared to infants and toddlers.

Other activities and services. An hour-long PACT time is scheduled twice a week. During this time, parents go to the early childhood classroom to engage in activities with their children. Sometimes these activities are pre-planned; other times parents are instructed to follow their children's interests. After PACT time, parents eat lunch with the children, read quietly with them individually, and prepare them for naps.

Even Start parents also receive monthly home visits from either a part-time Even Start parent facilitator or an instructor in the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), one of the program's collaborators. Each visit conducted by HIPPY is highly structured and targets efforts toward one HIPPY-eligible child; in contrast, the Even Start parent facilitator plans home visits around literacy activities for the entire family and brings "activity suitcases" containing books in English and Spanish, arts and crafts supplies, and other simple materials to engage all family members.

Collaboration and Resources

The project has several collaborators that provide on-site services for Even Start participants, including: (1) a Migrant Head Start project that provides early childhood services to some Even Start participants; (2) a volunteer from AmeriCorps VISTA who provides pesticide safety training to migrant and seasonal field workers and who also serves as an Even Start adult education tutor; and (3) Catholic Charities, which runs a food and clothing pantry and provides counseling and health education to Even Start participants.

The project's 1996-97 Even Start grant represented its fourth and last year of Migrant Education Even Start funding. The grant provides only a small portion of the funds that operate all the project components. During the 1996-97 program year, the Migrant Education Even Start grant totaled $77,063, which paid for the senior early childhood teacher and her two assistants. Other funds to support the project come from the district's adult and community education funds and a parent involvement grant from the state-level Center for Excellence. Some private and corporate donations and in-kind contributions also help defray overall costs and pay for special events, activities, and supplies.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

The Even Start program at the San Jose Mission Family Learning Center is evaluated by an independent evaluator hired by the grant administrator in the state department of education. (The state department of education administered the Migrant Education Even Start Grant that supported four

programs in the state from 1993-1997, including the program at the Family Learning Center.) The 1995-96 evaluation found that of the 31 children aged one to five who participated in the program, 21 percent moved from non-verbal to verbal on the Child Observation Record. In addition, 13 percent of the children who spoke no English at the beginning of the program year moved to the limited English speaking category. The evaluation also found that all adults with pre- and post-test scores made literacy gains, although the assessment measures used varied by participant skill level.

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Webster-Groves Even Start Project
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Community Context

The Webster-Groves Even Start project is located in a suburb of St. Louis. The project targets high needs families from the nearby community of Webster-Groves and offers services at a free-standing location known as the Family Learning Center. The center, comprised of several classrooms, a computer lab, lending library, office space, and a large common area, is located in a small commercial building. In 1996-97, the program served 93 adults and 162 children, including 53 infants and toddlers, 61 preschoolers, and 48 school-age children. Almost all adult participants are single African-American women who receive public assistance. About 80 percent of adults have neither a high school diploma nor a GED; more than 90 percent are females (85 of 93 adult participants in 1996-97). About 4 percent of children have been identified as having special needs.

Activities and Services

The project offers services from 8:30 a.m. to 2:15 p.m., Monday through Thursday during the school year and during a five-week summer session. Evening sessions with child care are also offered twice a week.

Adult education. Adult education is offered for three to four hours, four days and two evenings a week, and encompasses GED preparation, adult basic education, and computer training in a literacy context. In response to welfare-to-work initiatives, staff have recently developed a new, semester-long curriculum unit that stresses pre-employment and basic job skills training, also within a literacy context. Several community volunteers assist adult education staff in providing one-on-one and small group basic skills tutoring.

Parenting education. Parenting sessions are offered twice a week for one to two hours. Topics include positive parenting, alcohol and drug use, domestic violence, crisis intervention, psycho-social issues, and general life skills. Staff often invite local service providers and educators to speak about issues and introduce parents to their services. Parents also have the opportunity to discuss issues of personal concern in support groups.

Early childhood education. The Family Learning Center operates three classrooms, for infants (birth to 18 months), toddlers (18 months to three years), and preschoolers (three to five years). Curriculum and instruction is informed primarily by the Project Construct and High/Scope curricula, which are based on child-directed, exploratory learning. Activities and room arrangements are designed to promote child development in the four primary domains addressed by the Project Construct curriculum: socio-moral, cognitive, representational (including language), and physical development. Teachers hold conferences with parents of infants and toddlers at least every three months to update a developmental checklist and discuss infants' demonstration of milestones.

Other activities and services. PACT time is scheduled every day for 30 minutes and typically consists of child-directed free play. An additional 15 minutes of the day is reserved for parents and children to read together as part of a Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program. Regular parent-teacher conferences provide an opportunity for staff to discuss their perceptions of parent-child interactions with parents and to assist them in developing new strategies and activities for use in the home.

Home visits are conducted four to six times a year, although high-risk families or families with a large number of children are visited more often. Parents who are initially reluctant to participate in home visits may participate in group home visits for two or three new parents, hosted by experienced Even Start parents.

Other services include: counseling by a part-time counselor on staff; early childhood and parenting education for teenage Even Start participants at a local high school; transportation to the center and on field trips; free meals through the school district; and special events such as family math and computer nights, holiday celebrations, extended field trips, and an annual fashion show sponsored by local retailers.

Collaboration and Resources

Collaborators include a local health clinic, two local libraries, the county employment and training office, a bank, a state representative, the county welfare office, the local ministries organization, local schools, Parents as Teachers, and a local university. Head Start refers families to Even Start for adult education and infant/toddler services. Some Head Start children ages three to five are transported by Head Start to Even Start for afternoon activities and child care.

Federal Even Start funds, totaling $260,435 in 1996-97, represent half of the project's total budget. The Children's Trust Fund (state funding) contributed about $57,000 in 1996-97. Other sources of support include a state early childhood grant and in-kind contributions from the school district, Head Start, and Parents as Teachers. The project's 1996-97 Even Start grant represented its seventh year of Even Start funding; a future funding committee is exploring options for new funding sources.

Evaluation and Evidence of Success

The project evaluation assesses progress toward project goals and objectives in the areas of adult literacy, child development, and parenting skills. Indicators of success from the 1995-96 program evaluation include the following:

- Twenty-two adults with pre- and post-test scores on the CASAS reading test made average gains that were statistically significant; 11 adult participants completed their GED.

- Thirty-two adults with pre- and post-test scores on a parenting survey designed to capture parents' knowledge of developmental expectations and parent-child interaction

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skills made statistically significant average gains. Parents also made statistically significant average gains on an observation-based Adult-Child Interaction Rating Scale, consisting of 30 items rated by project staff on a four-point scale.

- Thirty-eight children (aged three to seven) with pre- and post-test scores on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), made average gains that were statistically significant. Four children (aged three to five) had both pre- and post-test scores on the PSI. Although this was too few to determine significance, each child made substantial gains, ranging from five to 15 points on the 32-point test. The evaluation also collected teacher ratings of former Even Start participants in kindergarten through the third grade in the areas of number skills, visual skills, fine motor skills, auditory skills, and language skills. No significant differences between Even Start and non-Even Start students were detected, except in the area of visual skills, in which Even Start students were ranked slightly lower than non-Even Start students. This general parity is considered an indicator of success given the very needy population served by the project. For example, during the 1995-96 program year incoming Even Start children scored in the lowest 16 percent of the population on the nationally normed PPVT test.

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Appendix B

Supplemental Quality Indicators for Even Start Family Literacy Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers

Introduction

New research has drawn the nation's attention to the importance of the infant and toddler years to future success in school and adulthood. Findings from the fields of neuroscience, linguistics, and human development have deepened our understanding of the strong relationship between experiences in the first three years of life and later physical, emotional, social, linguistic, and cognitive functioning. These findings suggest that if learning does not occur during critical "windows" of brain development, some cognitive and sensory deficits may be difficult to overcome (Begley, 1996; Nash, 1997). This information makes a strong case for the need for high-quality, research-based interventions for developmentally at-risk infants and toddlers and their families.

Increasingly, the federal government has taken a role in supporting programs that improve educational opportunities for families with young children. The Even Start Family Literacy Program, funded through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, supports intensive, family-centered education programs intended to help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy. Even Start programs integrate early childhood education, adult education, and parenting education to involve parents and children, from birth through age seven, in a cooperative effort in learning.

According to data from the Even Start Information System (ESIS), during the 1996-97 program year 608 of the 655 Even Start sites[1] across the country served infants and toddlers (93 percent). A little more than one-third of these sites (222 sites) reported that they specifically targeted this age group for services. The services that Even Start projects provide to infants and toddlers and their families are of particular importance because of: (1) the speed and complexity of child development at this age, and (2) the need to capitalize on early learning windows that establish the foundation for future learning.

The indicators and examples in this document reflect findings from a case study of promising Even Start projects serving infants and toddlers. To collect information on promising strategies for serving infants and toddlers and their families, members of the study team visited nine projects during the winter of 1997. The nine projects visited were:

- Chicago Commons Employment Training Center, Chicago, Illinois
- The Decker Family Development Center, Barberton, Ohio
- Early Education Services, Brattleboro, Vermont

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[1] Some local projects operate at more than one site with significantly different program designs. In such cases, projects are asked to report ESIS data separately for each site.

- The Family Service Center, West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana
- Jefferson County Public Schools Even Start, Louisville, Kentucky
- Oklahoma City Even Start, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District Even Start, Alamo, Texas
- San Jose Mission Family Learning Center, Dover, Florida
- Webster-Groves Even Start, St. Louis, Missouri

The following project-level quality indicators are based on case study findings and are designed to assist practitioners in their efforts to manage and improve Even Start services for infants and toddlers and their families. They are meant to complement—not duplicate—other indicator systems of program performance and quality. Specifically, they are designed to supplement the *Guide to Quality in Even Start Family Literacy Programs* developed by RMC Research Corporation. Thus, they are grouped into several of the categories used in the RMC guide, including early childhood program settings, transitions, staff development, parent-child interaction and parenting education, integration, and collaboration.

The supplemental indicators included in this document focus on features observed during case study site visits and noted by project staff as being particularly important in serving infants and toddlers and their families. The indicators focus both on program features that affect infants and toddlers directly (e.g., early childhood program settings, transitions), and those that affect infants and toddlers indirectly (e.g., parenting education, integration, collaboration). In addition, outcome-based indicators are included in the areas of early childhood programs and parenting education.

The indicators do not attempt to capture all that is known about quality considerations in serving infants and toddlers. Extensive guidelines in this area have already been developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Zero to Three National Center, and the Head Start Bureau in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Lally et al., 1995; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1994; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). Similarly, as a matter of practicality, key features that are not easily measurable—such as the nature of relationships between staff and children—are not addressed in the indicators.

Supplemental Quality Indicators for Even Start Projects Serving Infants and Toddlers

Early Childhood Program Settings

1. Projects serving infants and toddlers have staff-child ratios that are high enough to provide children with frequent, one-on-one attention and nurturing, at least 3:1 in classrooms serving infants and 4:1 in classrooms serving toddlers. Projects serving infants and toddlers also maintain small group sizes, consistent with expert recommendations.

2. Projects serving infants and toddlers provide a language-rich environment, as evidenced by teachers' verbal interactions with children during daily routines such as diapering and feeding, one-on-one storybook reading, and by environmental print/labels in the classroom.

3. Projects serving infants and toddlers arrange the early childhood environment to provide stimulating learning and activity areas for young children.

> *In the Oklahoma City Even Start Project in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the infant and toddler classroom environment is designed to be appealing to young children and offer a variety of opportunities for exploratory learning. The classroom is decorated with children's artwork and pictures, and arranged into a number of areas, including an area with soft foam climbing structures for large motor activities, a housekeeping corner for "pretend play," a comfortable reading area with sturdy cardboard books for one-on-one reading, a block area, an art area, and a large carpeted area lined with shelves of manipulatives for "floor play". A separate area of the classroom with cribs, cots, and colorful hanging mobiles is set aside for quiet time and naps.*

4. Projects serving infants and toddlers have appropriate and accessible diapering and toileting facilities for infants and toddlers, and handwashing facilities for staff and children.

5. Projects serving infants and toddlers use an early childhood curriculum that stresses active learning through exploratory play, and addresses key areas of children's development, including physical, social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development.

> *The Jefferson County Public Schools Even Start Project in Louisville, Kentucky, bases its curriculum primarily on the High/Scope curriculum for infants and toddlers which focuses on active learning in the areas of: social relations, sense of self, communication, movement, exploring objects/pre-representation, exploring attributes of objects/classification, comparing and counting, space (e.g., exploring and noticing the relationships of objects to other objects, taking things apart and fitting things together), and time (e.g., anticipating familiar events, noticing the beginnings and endings of time intervals, experiencing fast and slow).*

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6. Projects assess infant and toddler development at least quarterly, using multiple methods, including staff observations, parent reports, and, for toddlers, collections of representative work. Projects review these assessment results regularly, share them with parents, and adjust curriculum or activities planned to meet the identified needs of individual children.

At the Webster-Groves School District Even Start Project in St. Louis, Missouri, early childhood teachers conduct conferences with parents of infants and toddlers at least every three months to update a locally-developed developmental checklist. At these conferences, parents and teachers discuss their observations of children's demonstration of milestones such as tracking objects by sight, crawling, and verbalizing among infants, and using words to express needs, following simple directions, and exercising self-help skills among toddlers. Staff at Webster-Groves also use the Denver Developmental Screening Test to screen children for developmental delays that would require special intervention.

Outcomes

7. Kindergarten teachers report that children who received Even Start services as infants and toddlers have the requisite skills to function successfully in the school setting.

Transitions

1. In projects serving infants and toddlers, children's parents and staff from children's current and future classrooms meet at least once prior to a transition between Even Start classrooms, or from Even Start to other preschool programs, to develop a transition plan.

2. Infants and toddlers are prepared for transitions between classrooms or programs by a series of visits to the new classroom.

At the Family Service Center in West Feliciana, Louisiana, as toddlers approach age three, they move into a co-located Head Start program. Staff assist with the transition by developing an individual transition plan for each child and arranging for a series of visits and short stays in the Head Start classroom that the child will eventually join.

Staff Development

1. Projects serving infants and toddlers provide staff training opportunities on infant/toddler development and/or caregiving on an ongoing basis. Infant and toddler staff also receive regular assessments of, and feedback on, their performance.

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In the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District Even Start Project in Alamo, Texas, much training specific to working with infants and toddlers is provided "in-house" by an early childhood specialist. This specialist provides training on approaches to working with young children and their families each Friday, and rotates among the early childhood classrooms during the rest of the week to provide supervision and additional training and support to the early childhood staff.

Parent-Child Interaction and Parenting Education

1. In projects serving infants and toddlers, parenting education is provided in at least two formats in addition to informal communication, such as parenting education classes, parent support groups, parent and child interaction time, and one-on-one conferences.

At the Chicago Commons Employment Training Center in Chicago, Illinois, parents of infants and toddlers receive instruction on child development and parenting techniques through several avenues, including: (1) life skills classes that spend several class sessions on parenting; (2) biweekly parenting support groups in English or Spanish; and (3) private parent and child interaction sessions with parenting guidance in the on-site Lekotek toy and book lending library. Lekotek is a national program that uses play as the medium to teach parenting skills and promote children's literacy and healthy development.

2. Projects serving infants and toddlers include information and materials related to infant and toddler physical, social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development in parenting education curricula and/or lesson plans. Projects' parenting education component also addresses specific strategies and activities for parents to use in stimulating and supporting their infants' and toddlers' development.

3. Projects provide opportunities at least weekly for parents to practice strategies for stimulating and supporting their infants' and toddlers' development.

The Decker Family Development Center in Barberton, Ohio, offers Parent and Child Together (PACT) time activities for parents and their infants and toddlers once a week, in conjunction with parenting education classes. Before each PACT time, early childhood staff visit the parenting class to explain the upcoming PACT time activity and how it will connect to the principles of child development, emergent literacy, and parent-child interaction that parents are studying in parenting education classes.

4. Projects serving infants and toddlers work with parents to develop specific, developmentally appropriate goals for their infants and toddlers.

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At Early Education Services, home visitors provide parents with information on child development stages and appropriate expectations and work with parents to set and attain specific goals for their children.

Outcomes

5. Staff observe an increase in the number and diversity of strategies used by parents for stimulating their infants' and toddlers' development during regularly scheduled parent-child activities.

Staff at the Webster-Groves Even Start project and the Family Service Center in West Feliciana assess gains in parenting skills by observing parent-child interactions during PACT time. Staff use the Adult-Child Interaction Rating Scale and the Nurturing Behavior Checklist (respectively) to guide their observations and analysis of behaviors such as reading to a child, making positive statements to a child, and responding to a child's request for assistance. According to staff observations at West Feliciana, 55 percent of Even Start parents implemented at least three suggested parenting techniques during the 1995-96 program year. In the same year, parents at Webster-Groves made statistically significant average gains on the Adult-Child Interaction Rating Scale.

Integration of Components

1. In projects serving infants and toddlers, joint staff planning of activities related to infant and toddler development occurs once a week and includes staff from all program components.

Staff at the West Feliciana project hold monthly Action Meetings to coordinate their teaching efforts across the early childhood, adult literacy, and parenting education components. They create a Curriculum Action Plan to ensure that, for example, the issues that parents discuss in parenting class link to their social studies reading in adult literacy, the books they read with their children in PACT time, and the activities their children experience in class. Similarly, staff make sure that guest speakers, presenters, field trips, and other events are coordinated across the different program components.

2. In projects serving infants and toddlers, parents of infants and toddlers observe and participate in the early childhood education classroom at least weekly.

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Parenting education instructors in several projects gave examples of parents who, after observing other children in their infant's or toddler's classroom, deepened their understanding of developmental stages and common behaviors. Some projects intentionally tie parenting lessons to observations in early childhood classrooms. At the Jefferson County project, parents first read magazine articles about early brain development in adult literacy classes, and then observe their children's behavior and interactions during PACT time. In the subsequent parenting class, they discuss the connections between the information in the reading and their observations of their own children.

Collaboration

1. Projects serving infants and toddlers develop or adapt needs assessment instruments that guide the identification of family needs for services (in addition to core Even Start services) in areas of particular importance to families with infants and toddlers, such as social support, health, or nutrition services. Needs assessments are completed within three months of enrollment and reviewed and updated regularly.

Staff at Early Education Services have developed a Family Assessment Profile that assesses family needs in a number of areas, including income, housing, transportation, physical health, mental health, nutrition, social support, parenting, education, literacy, and child development. Families meet with program staff at Family Update Meetings every three months to update the profile and review family progress.

2. Projects serving infants and toddlers enter into formal or informal collaborative relationships with other providers of services that are particularly important for families with infants and toddlers, including health care providers, family support programs, and early intervention programs.

The San Jose Mission Family Learning Center in Dover, Florida, has established formal or informal collaborative relationships with a number of key providers of services to infants and toddlers and their families, including: (1) local physicians and dentists; (2) the school district early intervention screening program; (3) counselors, health educators, and a food and clothing pantry affiliated with Catholic Charities; and (4) a local Head Start project. The project helps families to make use of these services by arranging for many of them to be provided on site and by accompanying families to other services as needed.

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